

ZIONBOUND

Being the Restored Church in the 21st Century

By David R. Donoghue

This is a series of related articles I'm writing to explore my views on how we can express and revitalize our Restoration beliefs in the 21st century.

THE NEW CONSERVATIVES – Part One

There have been many occasions over the years when my traditional church views have made me feel very alone, even isolated in the church. The fact that I have felt this way at times also became its own source of resentment, frustration, and even irony.

The irony derived from the fact that, in my mind, I felt that what separated me from most members of the church was the fact that I had the nerve, or the audacity, to actually believe in, well, our beliefs.

In my opinion, members of churches are supposed to believe in their church's beliefs. It sort of goes together, and it's circular: believe...beliefs – beliefs...believe; and it has always struck me as strange that many church members, at least, in my own experience, do not believe in some of our beliefs.

However, I have come to understand that I am far from alone, and that numerous church members share several, if not all, of my major church convictions.

I have also come to understand that many non-traditionalists don't know what makes a church traditionalist what he or she is; and in fact, that may be true of some traditionalists as well.



It has been my observation that non-traditionalists sometimes misunderstand what motivates a church conservative, or, to put it another way, many people don't understand why traditionalists have the viewpoints that they do, or what those viewpoints are based upon, and why it's sometimes not possible to accept certain things.

Therefore, I want to share a little list I've made of what I feel are some common convictions that conservative church members have. When we resist some of the changes that have occurred in the church, it is often because of these convictions, and these convictions alone, and not for the many other speculative reasons that some people might presume.

But before I go any further into this area, let me make a comment on the use of labels. When I converse with church members, I often use terms like "liberal", "conservative", "traditionalist", "moderate", etc (within a church context – not political).

On occasion, some people have responded directly to my use of such terms. They have cautioned me, quite appropriately, that such terminology, such labelling, such classification can sometimes be negative.

I truly appreciate and respect that point-of-view. And there are many cases when I agree that labelling can be negative. So I want to explain why I use these terms, within a church context.

There are a couple of reasons. The first is, I'm a lazy writer. It is, quite honestly, just very convenient to say "conservative" vs:

"people who have a tendency to be comfortable with the former customs and would prefer that you avoid tampering with anything that could be construed as doctrinal or theological in nature." :)

The second reason is, using such terminology helps me better understand who I am, again, in a church context. It helps me better identify with my own spiritual growth. It gives me a base, or foundation. And it even pushes me to new understandings, as we shall soon see.

It also, I feel, helps people have a shared identity. It provides a sense of comfort, and connection, and that in turn, especially when conversing with people with opposite points-of-view, makes our interactions less intimidating.

In short, it helps eliminate that sense of loneliness and isolation that I spoke of earlier. It provides a sense commonality, even community. And of course, no one has to feel that they must align with any church demographic.

Returning to the question of "what is a conservative?" (within the context of Community of Christ), I of course have to acknowledge that I can only present things as I see them, but I do

feel it is worth exploring just what it means to be a conservative or traditional church member, and I am confident that what I outline below does cover a lot of the conservative membership of the church.

In essence, there are (in my opinion) several “**cardinal convictions**” that we traditionalists are very likely to share. What I feel are the most common are presented here. We believe in...

- 1) God: This may seem obvious, but it is still worth highlighting. I should also point out that most conservatives understand God in the traditional Christian sense (save perhaps where tweaked by Restoration scripture) – that of some sort of supreme, divine personage with purpose, intelligence, personality, memory, identity, etc. This is very important, because a person’s view of God will shape his or her theology *and* how they approach scripture.
- 2) Jesus Christ: Traditionalists tend to believe that Jesus was a historical figure, and that he was truly God incarnated, rose from the dead, etc.
- 3) Apostasy: The ancient church & priesthood became corrupt and had to be restored by God.
- 4) Joseph Smith Junior: A true prophet of God called to restore the priesthood and the church; whose sections in the Doctrine and Covenants (along with those of his true successors) presented as divine revelations, truly are.
- 5) Joseph Smith III: The true legitimate successor to Joseph Smith Jr.
- 6) Authority: We are the one true church & our priesthood alone has power and authority from God. But what this truly means is likely not well understood.
- 7) Book of Mormon: Is both inspired scripture, and a historical account of a lost civilization.
- 8) Inspired Version: Is the result of divine revelation, for the purpose of correcting some errors and restoring some lost content.
- 9) The Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the Doctrine and Covenants are the only true examples of scripture, which is the result of divine inspiration/revelation, and therefore spiritually inerrant.
- 10) Scripture trumps World Conference resolutions, which trump the Bylaws, which trump various statements and policies, procedures, parliamentary rules, etc., including the Enduring Principles, History Principles, Statements on Scripture, Basic Beliefs, the Church Administrator’s Handbook, theology statements, individual policy statements, etc. The further

revealed will of God, by definition, becomes (if accepted), scripture. Therefore, that which is not scripture can *never* trump scripture.

Questions to Ponder

What are your thoughts regarding the above list? What are you comfortable with, and what do you struggle with? Had you considered these items before, and do you feel that this list is at least a somewhat accurate summary of what conservative church members believe?

THE NEW CONSERVATIVES – Part Two

Understanding that many traditionalists will hold to some of the conservative convictions presented in part one, will help people understand why conservatives like myself have the opinions that we do.

For example, let us presume that a traditionalist is debating a doctrinal issue, and quotes a verse attributed to Moses. This is countered by someone saying any of the following:



- a) God's revelation to Moses, though divine, was nonetheless received through the filter of Moses' own humanity, therefore, it is possible that what Moses wrote as representing the mind and will of God is not wholly accurate.
- b) Moses did not write some portions of his books.
- c) One or more of the books of Moses were not written by Moses at all.
- d) None of the books of Moses were written by Moses.
- e) Moses did not exist.
- f) The Old Testament is meant to be understood only metaphorically.

If any of the above are used, the person so doing will then immediately negate any hope of convincing the person he is debating with that his view is valid, because, point a) clashes with (at least) cardinal conviction #9 (scripture is spiritually inerrant), points b) through e) clash with cardinal conviction #8 (the Inspired Version is the result of divine revelation); and point f) clashes with both #8 & #9.

Look at it this way. A conservative church member who accepts the validity of the Inspired Version therefore believes that the Inspired Version is correct, and that it is the result of divine revelation. It was God's effort to correct mistakes, restore lost truths, and remove falsehoods. If you accept the Inspired Version, you reject many of the notions that some people have today regarding the Bible. Belief in the validity of the Inspired Version, and in the validity of some of the newer theories about Moses and his authorship (or very existence) of the Torah, are, quite simply, not compatible.

But let's move on.

Personally, I celebrate (where appropriate) the various cardinal convictions. I greatly cherish the elements that we have in common with all Christians, as well as those elements that are unique to Community of Christ and / or the Latter Day Restoration Movement. I'll even say that I find them empowering and exciting – when understood, and used, appropriately.

Yet, I have come to recognize in myself, and occasionally in other traditionalists, some traits that are not things that ought to be celebrated. These, in my view, include the following (what we might term “**constraining customs**”):

1) We often don't return to the scriptures. What I mean by that is that if we have a particular doctrinal opinion based on a passage that we reviewed a long time ago, we often perpetually presume that our prior interpretation was correct. We seldom feel the need to go back to what we read before, and make sure that we read it correctly, and / or that we interpreted it correctly.

2) We tend give false authority to things we read or were told, especially when we don't like them, irregardless of how old they are, without taking into consideration more current references. Why would we do this? Why would we “authorize” something we don't like? Quite simply, to have more ammunition to find fault with the church or at least it's leadership.

I've often heard, as recent as 2013, people cite the “Positions Papers” (which is probably about 30 years old), or quote something said by an apostle 25 years ago to “prove” that the church today is off track. This is not a truly honest approach.

You see, we must keep current with the latest statements, etc., to truly understand what the church is advocating **today**. We can't just ignore the current positions and say “well, I read 30 years ago..” or say “well an apostle once said to me, 25 years ago...” and give more authority to such things than the actual current policies and positions of the church. But we tend to often do just that. We tend to authorize things that were never official, and never truly authoritative in the first place, and we often don't want to let go of them, because for us, they may have been personal. But, we need to move on, and ensure that we are clear on what the living church is endorsing *today*.

3) We tend to regard church folklore and church tradition and church custom and local church culture as church doctrine. When these things are sometimes changed, we sometimes respond just as passionately as when a change in a church position is considered. Yet, we need to understand that church folklore, tradition, etc, are **not** doctrinal. They are not reflective of our theology (even when derived from it).

4) We tend to be stubborn, to the point of preferring stagnation (and therefore church death) over rejuvenation.

- 5) We really don't like admitting that we are wrong. Even (& especially) when it's proven that we are.
- 6) We sometimes put how we want things to be ahead of how God would have things be.
- 7) Sometimes, we are so comfortable with the status quo that our motivation for what we teach and preach becomes muddled. Are we really proclaiming God's truth, or simply finding reasons to defend what we would prefer God's truth to be?
- 8) We often don't like change. We envision the ideal church as being the church as it existed in our own childhoods, overlooking the fact that the church has never been, nor can it ever be (if it is to be effective), static.
- 9) We have a tendency to view the church as a rural, North American institution. We therefore feel threatened by doing what Christ told us to do (taking the gospel into all nations, converting all people), because we fear the influence of other races, nations, cultures and experiences.
- 10) We become preoccupied by petty issues and fail to focus on what matters most.
- 11) We often fail to embrace the church's supporting documents, such as the Enduring Principles or Mission Initiatives, because we are too preoccupied with the "correctness" of our church, its "Restorationisness".
- 12) Some of us fail to express unconditional love by deliberately withholding our tithes from World Church as a form of punishment. This is unacceptable.
- 13) We often interpret someone disagreeing with us as a personal attack.
- 14) If we cannot win a debate, we often simply drop out of the dialog.

The time has come for a new breed of conservative church member to arise within our global membership...those who still cherish the cardinal convictions outlined in Part One, but are willing to let go of the constraining customs outlined above; they are those who are willing to see our Restoration heritage as a means of furthering our transformation into a 21st century church.

Questions to Ponder

What are your thoughts regarding the above list? What are you comfortable with, & what do you struggle with? Are any of them true for you?

THE NEW CONSERVATIVES – Part Three

Being a traditionalist is not really about promoting tradition for that sake alone. Being conservative should not ever be about impeding progress and fostering stagnation! We need a new understanding of what it means to be conservative.

What I call traditionalist or conservative perspectives regarding the church might be better expressed as “Restoration foundationalism”.



To put it simply, as demonstrated by the list of cardinal convictions in Part One, I believe in many of the things that this church was built on: God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the revelations of Joseph Smith, the divine organization of the church, the Book of Mormon, the Inspired Version of the Bible, etc. These are deeply important to me. They are part of my personal theological identity.

So, I’m a “foundationalist”. But being a foundationalist is not incompatible with belonging to an innovative church. I don’t need to be arrogant in my beliefs, and I don’t need to presume that my interpretations are 100% accurate.

In fact, as a foundationalist, I know that the (1st) prophet Nephi, some 2,600 years or so ago, encouraged us to ponder scripture. This is what he wrote:

“For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them...” -Second Nephi, 3:29 (RLDS 1908)

This is one of my favorite verses of scripture. Think about it. Nephi didn’t just read the scriptures. He pondered them. He wrestled with them, sought to understand them, and formed interpretations of them.

This must become a principle that all church members should adopt: We must not just read the scriptures, we must ponder them.

As I have been challenged by the church to explore my beliefs, I have found that our foundational beliefs and doctrines still sign to me. They still excite me, and they still, in my opinion, reflect God’s truth. In short, I still believe in our beliefs.

But the exploration has taught me that I don’t need to resist everything. For example, if the church wants to broaden and deepen it’s understanding of Zion, I’m totally ok with that. In fact,

I embrace that. I don't need to cling to the notion that everyone should uproot themselves and move to the city of Independence.

But I still believe that Independence is (or will become) Zion. I don't feel that my belief on that point is in any way threatened by broadening and deepening our understanding of Zion to see the benefit to the world of building Zion communities outside of Zion.

The point is, I don't need to resist that new way of thinking about Zion, because it does not negate or diminish my own beliefs. It does not negate Joseph Smith, or the Book of Mormon, or any of the other foundational beliefs that I hold to be sacred truths.

And, the new understanding of Zion can also become one of my personal beliefs...and not merely a corporate belief that I feel obligated to claim as my own, or begrudgingly accept as true, but I can, without negating my other understanding of Zion, truly accept, embrace, and celebrate the broader notions of Zion.

That is the beauty of being a foundationalist. I don't need to feel that I have to resist things. I can continue to cherish all those foundational concepts, and be fully excited and passionate about our Enduring Principles, our call to respond generously, our Mission Initiatives, and the challenge to magnify our callings.

So that is who I am now. I'll still call myself a conservative, or a traditionalist. But in my heart, what I really mean is, I'm a foundationalist. And if you think as I do, then you are too. As such, we are the new conservatives. And that gives us the freedom to envision a church that is both a church of the Restoration, **and** a 21st century church *at the same time!*

And if we can truly become that, then maybe one day, all of us, conservatives, liberals, foundationalists, moderates, etc., can shed our labels, no longer needing the security that they offer, and just be the church that Christ is calling us to be.

In the mean time, it is my hope and prayer that liberals will strive to better understand where conservatives are coming from, and it also my prayer that conservatives will, in addition to being patient with liberals, more deeply explore their own convictions, why they have them, what they truly mean, and what they enable us to become.

If you lean more towards the liberal or moderate spectrums of the church, are you willing to strive to better understand why traditionally minded people have the positions that they do?

If you are a conservative church member, are you willing to evolve into a foundationalist? Are you willing to find your voice, to courageously proclaim both what you believe **and** your support of the full mission of the church? Are you willing to let go of the constraining customs, and embrace the call to be generous and committed disciples, who see the heritage of the

Restoration not as an end unto itself, but the means by which our sacred community can truly become a 21st century church?

Are you willing to help guide the church towards becoming something that truly resonates with people, and which is relevant and redemptive?

Will you join me on this journey? Consider yourself challenged to do so. Who will accept this challenge?

Questions to Ponder

What are some of your own “cardinal convictions”?

Are you able to keep them in the wake of a changing church? If not, why not?

Do you feel empowered to have traditional beliefs, should you wish to?

21st CENTURY RESTORATION

~ Resonate · Relevant · Redemptive ~

There have been many times when I have pondered what direction the church should move towards. We began in the 1830s as a Restoration church that sought to restore things to how they were in the New Testament; and while our understanding of “restoration” has deepened and broadened over time, we continue to regard ourselves, quite rightly, as “the Restoration”.

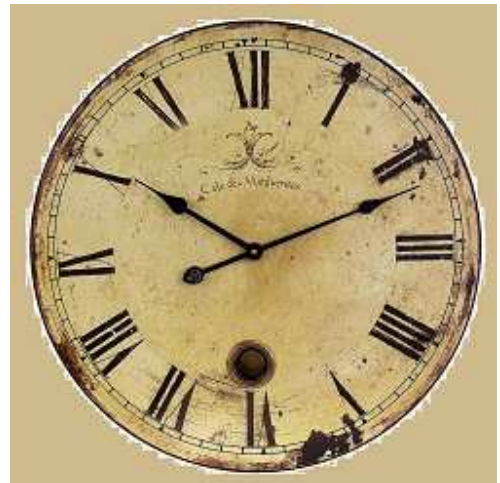
This can be seen in some of our most recent revelations, including:

“Be faithful to the spirit of the Restoration” –Doctrine and Covenants, Section 161:1b

“The spirit of the Restoration is not locked in one moment of time, but is instead the call to every generation to witness to essential truths in its own language and form. Let the Spirit breathe.” –Doctrine and Covenants, Section 162:2e

“Beloved children of the Restoration...” –Doctrine and Covenants, Section 164:9a

For quite some time I have had a sense that if Community of Christ is to have any hope of flourishing, it must be two things simultaneously:



1) It must be a Latter Day Restoration church.

2) It must be a 21st century church.

However, I'm sure that many people might wonder ... can the church truly be both of these things? Oh my goodness yes! Another question might be "are those not incompatible goals?" Absolutely not!

So how do we ensure that we are both of these things? Well, the first part is of course very simple. By permitting ourselves to be what we already are – perhaps with a little more passion.

You see, we already are a Latter Day Restoration church. So, we just need to keep being that – we just need to remember who we are (and it might serve us well if we turn up the Restoration gauge a bit).

It is being a 21st century church that takes more work. To be that we need to be a church that is **Relevant**, which **Resonates** with people and which is **Redemptive**. If we strive to be these things, we will make wonderful progress toward truly becoming a 21st century church.

Happily, being relevant, redemptive and a church that resonates with people in no way conflicts with being a Restoration church. We do not have to surrender our Restoration theology in order to be a 21st century church as we strive to be relevant, redemptive and resonating.

In fact, there is some overlap in these concepts, and that fact helps answer the following question:

Why be a Restoration church in the 21st century? Well, as I hinted above, we have no choice, if we wish to flourish – or just survive.

More than ever, we need to embrace our Restoration identity, culture, and heritage. Why? For one simple reason: if we lose it, then we will become just another street corner church. Of which there are thousands. Many of which seem to be stagnating and dying.

If we want to be relevant, we have to exist, and if we become less than who we have been before, we won't exist. Therefore our very Restoration heritage keeps us, in a very real and direct, if not always obvious way, relevant; and yes often our heritage might be relevant in less direct ways – but that does not make such relevance any less worthwhile.

Also, we cannot ignore the fact that one of the ways in which we do resonate with people is simply by virtue of the fact that we **are** a Latter Day Restoration church.

Through the wonders of social media, I have, many times, conversed with people outside of the church who are fascinated with our unique Restoration identity, culture, and heritage. Some of these people are serious seekers, desiring a new spiritual home in which God is not a distant figure, but a guiding voice. Quite simply, our Restoration theology resonates with people.

If our Restoration theology is deemed by some to be relevant and / or if it resonates with people, than of course it follows that it will also (hopefully) be redemptive.

Yet, I fully recognize that we cannot look only to our Restoration theology to ensure that we are resonating, redemptive, and relevant.

We need to make the mission, purpose, ministry and work of Jesus Christ our own; and we need to invite others to join with us. To do that, we need a message. A message of invitation. If we look to the example of Christ himself, he had his message of invitation: It was (and is) the Gospel, His Good News of God's doctrine of salvation.

As Christ's disciples, His message can be our message. In fact, it should be our message. But, not all the time. Not with all people. To put it quite simply, a lot of people today just don't care about such things. At least, not right away. Many will hide behind their masks, resisting every opportunity to hear the Good News. Therefore, we need, in our ministerial kit bag, other messages of invitation.

Here comes the annoying part. Unfortunately, I can't tell you what your other messages of invitation will be, because it will be different for each of us. It will be different depending on who you are talking to and who you are ministering to.

However, I can think of three possible foundations, scripturally based, upon which to shape a message that hopefully we will all be comfortable with.

The first message foundation is based on Doctrine and Covenants Section 161:3a, which states:

“Open your hearts and feel the yearnings of your brothers and sisters who are lonely, despised, fearful, neglected, unloved. Reach out in understanding, clasp their hands, and invite all to share in the blessings of community created in the name of the One who suffered on behalf of all.”

You see, you might speak to someone who simply needs to be invited to a place where they will be loved. Where they will find acceptance. For being real. For being who they truly are. Where they don't have to worry about rules or false perceptions. Or guilt. Where they will be valued for simply being who they are.

Our enduring principles, especially Unity in Diversity, and the Worth of All persons promote this type of accepting, welcoming community.

And there are people who are thirsting for that invitation, to be a part of a community like what we have in so many of our congregations and camping programs. For them, there may be nothing more relevant than being invited to belong to our community.

The second message foundation is based on Doctrine and Covenants Section 163:4a, which states:

“God, the Eternal Creator, weeps for the poor, displaced, mistreated, and diseased of the world because of their unnecessary suffering. Such conditions are not God’s will. Open your ears to hear the pleading of mothers and fathers in all nations who desperately seek a future of hope for their children. Do not turn away from them. For in their welfare resides your welfare.”

You may encounter people who want to do something meaningful. They want to support a cause; they want to make a difference in the world. So we need to have ministries in place that anyone can be a part of, member and non-members alike. We need to have the means by which we unlock what people are passionate about.

Peace and justice, abolishing poverty, ending suffering. These are some of our World Church mission initiatives. We need to find ways to embrace them, and support them, and invite others to be apart of whatever it is that we decide to do, to bless our community. These are areas that will, if properly done, resonate with people.

The third message foundation is based on Doctrine and Covenants Section 162:7d, which states:

“Each disciple needs a spiritual home. You are called to build that home and care for it, but also to share equally in the outreaching ministries of the church. In that way the gospel may be sent to other souls also yearning for a spiritual resting place.”

Some people want a spiritual home. They want to grow in spirituality. To grow closer to God. There are people who want to be converted to peace. There are people who want to be converted to hope. And we can help them along that path, by increasing our own spiritual formation.

When I was at the Kirtland Temple in early November 2012, I came to realize that being religious and believing in God is not enough. We can't just be religious, we can't just be people of faith: we must also be spiritual. And many of us are. Yet many of us are less so, but all of us need to grow in spirituality, and encourage others to do the same, which can enable us to provide redemptive ministry.

Relevant. Resonating. Redemptive. If our message, whatever it may be, can support these notions, then we will be doing the work of the Lord. We will be supporting his mission, purpose, ministry and work, his message and his invitation.

If we can find diverse ways to promote these three concepts, then we will be well on our way to being a 21st century church, and if we combine that with continuing to be a Restoration church (which again, also promotes these three concepts), I feel assured that we will, like never before, drive forward the cause of Zion.

Questions to Ponder

What is your message of invitation? How can you ensure that the church is relevant at the local level? Does the church resonate with others? Does it resonate with you? Are there times when the church is not redemptive? If so, why?

ARE WE NOT ALL BEGGARS?

“though ye believe not me, believe the works” –John 10:38 (I.V.)

I have not always been in a position where I can give to the church. And, on those occasions where I could, I often forgot to bring money. I have the good fortune to live in a first world nation, but to be honest, I almost don't carry cash anymore. If I need to make a purchase, I use my debit card. So, unfortunately, when I go to church, I often don't have any cash left over to contribute. Those are habits I need to fix; but there are larger issues.



When I do remember to bring money, or a check, it always feels good to put it in the offering plate. Its something I enjoy; but for much of my life, I only contributed to my home congregation. I overlooked giving to World Church. I always felt that I only had so much money to give, and my local branch needed the money more. I could see the immediate needs. The leaky roof. The broken tap. The payments for lawn mowing and snow ploughing.

I've always known about the efforts of World Church to help make the world a better place, but such ventures were out of sight, and therefore, sadly, out of mind.

However, in recent years, I have been more inclined to support both my local congregation, and World Church; and it feels very good to do so. It feels like an additional form of ministry. I'm still working on my habits, but, sadly, again, there are larger issues...

As a conservative member with many traditional beliefs, I have come to regard supporting World Church as part of my personal stewardship. I have been called by Jesus Christ to be one of His disciples, and supporting World Church is one of my responses to that call.

Knowing that generosity is part of our discipleship, I have been greatly saddened and troubled at times, over the years, to learn that some of my fellow conservative church members have made the decision to stop supporting World Church as a response to some of the changes that have taken place, or are expected to take place. This attitude completely baffles me, it shocks me and it is, quite simply, wrong.

No matter how frustrated you might be with the church, no matter how much you may resent some things that have transpired, withholding your tithes is not the answer! In fact, as we will see further below, doing so will probably only accelerate the things that conservatives don't want to see transpire! Now that's ironic!

But first, a reminder.

Whatever we have in this life, it came from God. There are no exceptions. I once gave expression to this reality in a poem. I am not a poet, but, despite that fact, I feel compelled to share it here.

The poem is entitled "I Owe God a lot of Money" and I wrote it to be included in the camp log of the senior high camp I attended in 1997.

*"I owe God a lot of money. Every dime I have ever had. Every penny I have ever made.
I owe it all to God.*

*I owe God a soda. Every drink I have ever had. Every meal I have ever enjoyed.
I owe these all to God.*

*I owe God a new shirt. Every coat I have ever worn. Every pair of shoes I have ever used.
I owe them all to God.*

*I owe God a tent. Every bed I have ever had. Every roof I have ever slept under.
I owe each and all to God.*

*I owe God a hug. Every friend I have ever known. Every relative I have ever had.
I owe every one to God.*

*I owe God a lot of stuff. Everything I have ever owned. Every item I have ever found.
I owe so much to God.
I owe God ever more. Every day that I have lived. All the tomorrows I shall ever have.
I owe no less than all to God”*

What do you owe God? Do you owe any less than I? All the blessings we have ever received are granted to us from our Lord. Therefore, it does not truly belong to us, but instead, it belongs to God.

If we withhold our offerings, then we are withholding them from our Redeemer. How can we call ourselves true Christians, true disciples of Jesus Christ if we decide to punish the church by withholding our contributions from the One who gave it to us in the first place?

Again, everything we have, including every dime, is a gift to us from God. We are all beggars; and we are reminded of that in the second chapter of the Book of Mosiah:

29 And ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish.

30 Perhaps thou shalt say, The man has brought upon himself his misery; therefore I will stay my hand, and will not give unto him of my food, nor impart unto him of my substance, that he may not suffer, for his punishments are just.

31 But I say unto you, O man, whosoever doeth this, the same hath great cause to repent; and except he repenteth of that which he hath done, he perisheth for ever, and hath no interest in the kingdom of God.

32 For behold, are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same being, even God, for all the substance which we have; for both food, and raiment, and for gold, and for silver, and for all the riches which we have of every kind?

33 And behold, even at this time, ye have been calling on his name, and begging for a remission of your sins.

34 And has he suffered that ye have begged in vain?

35 Nay; he has poured out his Spirit upon you, and has caused that your hearts should be filled with joy, and has caused that your mouths should be stopped, that ye could not find utterance, so exceeding great was your joy.

36 And now, if God, who has created you, on whom you are dependent for your lives, and for all that ye have and are, doth grant unto you whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive, O then, how had ye ought to impart of the substance that ye have, one to another?

37 And if ye judge the man who putteth up his petition to you for your substance, that he perish not, and condemn him, how much more just will be your condemnation, for withholding your substance, which doth not belong to you, but to God, to whom also, your life belongeth;

38 And yet ye put up no petition, nor repent of the thing which thou hast done.

39 I say unto you, wo be unto that man, for his substance shall perish with him; and now, I say these things unto those who are rich, as pertaining to the things of this world.

Yes, we are all beggars. Yet, God has freely given to us. We in turn must freely give. Even when we disagree with some of the changes that have been made. In fact, especially when we disagree. Such things test our faith.

The passage above from Mosiah teaches us in verses 30 and 31 that we are not to pass judgement on the beggar. We are told that if we do so, we will bring judgement upon us, for, we are also beggars (verse 32).

Likewise, we should not pass judgement on the church for the faults we find with it. For does God not find fault in each of us?

Other verses in the above passage remind us that we turn to God when we are in need; and, despite our faults and failings, despite our sins and transgressions, God provides for us; and God has called us to tithe, to give generously. Will we ignore that call because we have issues with the church? If we do so, would God's judgement on us not be just?

To put it simply, the fact that the church may have made changes that we might not be comfortable with in no way exempts us from our duty to tithe. However, that duty alone should not be the sole reason for why we should want to contribute generously.

At the end of World Conference 2010, President David Schaal preached a sermon in which he talked about the importance of giving to World Church. This is what he said:

“Friends, lets pay our tithing. The reason I say “let’s pay our tithing” is simply this: I am not motivated to pay my tithing simply so that the world church budget can be in some manner healthy on the balance sheet. I am motivated to pay my tithing because right now, missionaries, ministers, who are funded by World Church tithing dollars, in many places in this world, are helping young people learn how to avoid the ravages of the HIV virus, and because of your generosity there are children who are being spared that heartache. Its because not far from where I am standing right now there is a man who said to me not long ago, “I love this church – because of this church I get to be with my family, because I don’t do cocaine anymore” And he’s not doing cocaine anymore because of ministries that came his way funded by tithing dollars made possible by your generosity.”

President Schaal continued by saying:

“Friends let me be candid. there are times in which I hear people say “Well I don’t know if I want to pay tithing to the World Church because I just don’t see my congregation getting that much in return.” Brothers and sisters, its not about me or my congregation! Its about the values I hold dear! And because I do not want those children to get AIDS, because I want other

Daddies to be reunited with their children, because I want children all over the world to learn about the enduring principles of Community of Christ, and receive the gospel of Jesus Christ, as interpreted by our unique vision and unique pastoral and prophetic call. That's why I pay tithing! I don't care if I get anything in return! I pay because its in alignment with what I care for and what I value."

Brother Schaal concluded by stating:

"Plus, its just down right fun, to right that check, and to know, that my doing so is making a difference in my world. It is an intimate act of worship."

An intimate act of worship. O how I wish all church members felt the same way.

When conservative church members refuse to pay tithes, they are shooting themselves in the foot. If there are changes that we, as traditionalists, don't like, is the proper response "I'll hold back my funding"? No! In fact, that is really actually quite absurd.

The proper response is to give consideration to how we can help prevent other changes that we might not like from taking place.

As a [foundationalist](#), I have a deep passion for, and faith in, the foundational principles and events on which the entire Latter Day Restoration movement is based on.

Therefore, I feel a lot of sorrow when church members with similar views leave the church because of changes. That is not the proper response! Neither is refusing to pay tithes.

The proper response is to carry on. Seek ways to ensure that any other potential changes that you might not like do not come to pass. How can we do this? There are many ways, but it seems one avenue is never considered, which is this:

Become even more active in church life. Become part of the decision making process. Help guide the church by becoming church leaders. Take on volunteer positions in the church. Seek out and find church employment.

If you think that things are "becoming worse" in the church, than instead of shunning the church, position yourself to become part of the church's leadership, so that you can be in a position to do something about it. If you have no interest in working for the church than at least help empower other conservatives who might want to do just that. Trust me, they do exist.

It is my sincere conviction that the church truly needs active and passionate church members with conservative theological and doctrinal perspectives to seek opportunities for church

employment. This is what conservative church members need to do! We need to bring balance to the church, by working for the church! Forsaking the church is *never* the answer.

However, if you don't financially support the church than any conservative church members who might be out there with a sincere desire to work for the church, along with other people who desire to do likewise, won't have nearly as many (if any) opportunities to do so, as their won't be funding.

Therefore, if you want the church to shift in a direction that you desire then you truly need to empower the church to be in a position in which it can hire more people. Running away or punishing the church is not the answer.

So the next time you think to yourself "I'm not going to financially support World Church because I disagree with some of the changes that have been made", please give consideration to those conservative church members who might actually be hoping to one day work for the church, who might actually be desirous to prevent other changes from taking place, who might wish to see the church once again more fully embrace its Restoration heritage! We all have to be partners in this endeavor.

There are other great reasons to continue to pay tithes. The church is doing some wonderful things all over the world. We have great programs that are sustained by the financial gifts received from generous members everywhere.

Punishing the church only results in these programs being punished. Programs that help keep kids off the street, programs that help protect battered women, programs that take the gospel into all the world.

If you are not familiar with how the church spends its financial gifts please check out the generosity stories here:

<http://www.cofchrist.org/generositystories/>

I also strongly encourage everyone to become familiar with the mission initiatives of the church, which can be found here:

<http://www.cofchrist.org/mission/>

Please also review the Power of 10 website here:

<http://www.cofchrist.org/powerof10/>

Finally, consider enrolling in the PAT system so that you can make contributions to World Church without even thinking about it:

<http://www.cofchrist.org/give/>

May God bless you as you magnify your discipleship by responding generously.

Questions to Ponder

In what ways are you dependent on God?

If we punish the church by withholding tithes, how might that impact those who are in need?

What matters most?

A SACRED PURPOSE

I have often felt that there is a great deal of confusion among some members of the Restoration movement regarding why the Restoration itself exists. This is not to say that there isn't a purpose, but I don't think that the purpose is what many people believe it to be (this is perhaps especially true in other Restoration factions). This extends to the church as well. Both the Restoration, and the Church, have a purpose, a reason for existing. The church also has, in my opinion, an aim.



What follows is my attempt to outline what I feel these things are.

Purpose of the Restoration

Why did Christ bring about the Restoration? The traditional response would perhaps be something like “to restore the ancient church, to again bring forth power and authority from God”. In recent years we have been less likely to describe the Restoration in that manner, and have found new ways to express what it means to be the Restoration.

Some people feel that we have changed the meaning of the Restoration; that we have deviated from what we used to teach. I disagree. In my opinion, the church has simply deepened and broadened our understanding of what it means to be the Restoration.

Today, the concept of the Restoration now includes a call to restore mankind to the world, to restore people to each other, and to God, and I see nothing wrong with such notions.

In this sense, the Restoration is understood not as a single event, but as an ongoing process – which makes sense, given that God’s purposes are eternal. However, this broader, deeper understanding does not, in my view, negate the original understanding, which I am quite comfortable with, as I personally believe in the concept of the one true church (though I submit, we probably don’t really understand just what that means).

There is yet another element of the meaning of the Restoration. Beyond the original concept of restoring authority, beyond the added dimension of restorative action, there is a third aspect. One which perhaps binds the other two together.

A few years ago my father was teaching the adult Sunday school class at our congregation. He asked the question “what is the purpose of the Restoration”? He explained to the class that in his opinion the true purpose of the Restoration was to declare to the world that God is not dead, that Jesus Christ still speaks to His children even today.

This really resonated with me, and I think its very true. Our church is one of the few that accepts the notion that there is yet more light and truth to be revealed; and even fewer celebrate it as we do.

At the time of this writing, the most recent revelation added to our Doctrine and Covenants is Section 164. Furthermore, we have revelations, intended for the benefit of the global church, that exist outside of our Doctrine and Covenants.

This custom began in the presidency of Brother McMurray, who presented Letters of Counsel to the church regarding changes in the councils and quorums and orders of the church. When asked if these documents, should still be regarded as revelations, it is my recollection that President McMurray confirmed that they should be so regarded.

Although I have not been tracking them all, I presume that there have now been eight such documents (World Conferences 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2010 & 2013). In addition, between the 2010 and 2013 World Conferences, President Veazey released documents naming new appointments after some church leaders retired. I believe there were two such documents, again presented with assurances of the Spirit’s involvement.

We also cannot forget the words that resulted from the “impress of the Spirit” that President Veazey received while preparing his 2009 address, “A Defining Moment”, and which appear near the end of that document.

Naturally, we also must remember the latest “Words of Counsel” presented in April 2013.

These various revelatory experiences that the church has been blessed with since 1998, along with the continued custom of adding new inspired documents to the Doctrine and Covenants, should be clear evidence to anyone that the church is embracing and celebrating Continuing Revelation more so now, than ever before.

This is, to be sure, “Great and Marvellous” – what a blessing it is to live during an era of the church when we are so willing and eager to seek out God’s counsel and guidance.

Of course, even as the prophetic role of the prophet has actually been magnified in recent years, with all of these non D&C revelations, the prophetic role of the general membership has also increased, with God’s call to the whole church to be a prophetic people. We are all called to discern God’s will.

So, on the one hand we see that the whole membership has a role to play in the revelatory experience, and on the other hand, we see that the prophet also continues to have a very vital role to play in that same experience.

Clearly, we are a church with a prophet, and prophetic people. Simultaneously. That balance can only bless us. Truly, we are a church that values, embraces, and celebrates divine revelation, and in a plurality of ways.

We are blessed with continuing, modern revelation. We are blessed with an open canon of scripture. We are blessed with the knowledge that God is indeed not dead, that Christ still lives, and that the Lord still makes his mind and will known to us even in this modern, mostly secular 21st century world.

But are we listening?

Purpose of the Church

Community of Christ has a mission statement, which says:

“We proclaim Jesus Christ and promote communities of Joy, Hope, Love and Peace”

According to the bylaws of the church, the above mission statement is also our purpose statement.

Other resources help expand on this statement:

Our bylaws (Article II) include the following words:

“...The church envisions a time when the promise of God’s kingdom shall be fulfilled. We have a vision of that kingdom where the name of Jesus Christ is truly honored, where God’s will is done on earth, where the hungry are fed, poverty is alleviated, sinners are repentant, and sin is forgiven...”

...We believe that love is the proper foundation of our relationship with others, that opportunity to grow in the likeness of Christ should be fostered, and that the resources of the world can be managed to respect and preserve their creation and purpose. We have a vision of a time when all evil is overcome and peace prevails...

...We will be an international community of prophetic vision, faithful to the risen Christ, empowered by hope, spending ourselves courageously in the pursuit of peace and justice.”

Our Basic Belief statement states:

“We offer a community of people where the gospel of Jesus Christ is the focus of worship, learning, caring, and mission” Source: Basic Beliefs (“We offer”)

And also includes:

“The Good News of Jesus Christ is at the center of the faith and beliefs of Community of Christ. We are a worldwide community and are committed to follow Jesus, bring forth the kingdom of God, and seek together the revealing, renewing presence of the Holy Spirit.” Source: Basic Beliefs (“Preface”)

And further states:

“Being a Christian is more than holding a list of right ideas; it is about radical obedience to Jesus in every part of life...Jesus calls us to follow him and to invite others to experience the transforming power of his grace” Source: Basic Beliefs (“Discipleship”)

Our Enduring Principles offer these words:

“God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and continuing presence through the Holy Spirit, as proclaimed by scripture, is the foundation of our faith, identity, mission, message, and beliefs.” Source: Enduring Principles (“The Foundation”)

and:

“We are called to create communities of Christ’s peace in our families and congregations and across villages, tribes, nations, and throughout creation.” Source: Enduring Principles (Blessings of Community)

Our Mission Initiatives includes this statement:

"We are poised to share the peace of Jesus Christ with those who are waiting to hear the redeeming words of the gospel. We fulfill God's ultimate vision as we Baptize/Confirm Many New Members, Open New Congregations, Launch the Church in New Nations" Source: Mission Initiatives ("Invite People to Christ")

And the Doctrine and Covenants includes this passage:

"Heed the urgent call to become a global family united in the name of the Christ" Source: – 161:6b

All of the above wonderful statements help give expression to what our purpose is. However, in my opinion it all boils down to this statement of my own:

"to encourage appropriate worship of God according to the teachings of Jesus Christ."

Yet, that is perhaps too brief. As a [foundationalist](#), I'd be more comfortable with a little more definition:

"to encourage appropriate worship of God according to the teachings of Jesus Christ, and God's prophets, apostles, and other servants, as recorded in the scriptures of Community of Christ."

When I came to regard this as my own view of what the purpose of the church is, I then asked myself, "so what is our aim?"

Well, in many ways, many of the statements from the church resources listed above, might be better understood as aim statements, than as purpose statements (and I'm sure there is some overlap).

However, again, I've crafted my own:

"to have a positive, transformative impact on the lives of all people."

Yet this statement is a few years old now, and I'd probably want to tack on part of my congregation's vision statement, rendering the aim of the church as something like this:

"to have a positive, transformative impact on the lives of all people, by empowering them to Encounter God and Reflect Christ."

The full vision statement of my congregation is:

“Working with the Holy Spirit, empowering people to Encounter God and Reflect Christ.”

Printed copies of it include the church seal in the middle, and at the very bottom, part of the statement is repeated as a “sound bite”: **Encounter God! ~ Reflect Christ!**

I’ve come to grow very fond of our vision statement, especially the closing sound bite. In fact, I’ve always hoped that one day it might move beyond my congregation and perhaps be adopted by the greater church community. Who knows, maybe one day we will use it as a type of greeting, our own “live long and prosper” :)

One of the reasons I like the statement so much is because, in addition to perhaps being useful as part of an aim statement, it’s also a challenge. It causes one to ponder, just how do we do that? How do we empower people to encounter God? How do we reflect Christ?

I’ve come to realize that some of the concepts I’ve talked about in other blogs help provide the means to encounter God. If we are giving our congregations and visitors opportunities to be engaged in relevant, redemptive, and resonating activities, programs, ministries, etc., then it follows that at least some of these events should bring people into encounters with God.

With regard to reflecting Christ, that depends a great deal on those of us who are already disciples. Reflecting Christ is the real challenge. It means that we need to strive to be Christ-like, in how we interact with strangers, or our friends, our spouses, our co-workers, our family members, our congregations, our teammates, our competitors, our colleagues, or with people who have different theologies and/or political alignments.

In short, we must model the ideal Christian image, 24x7. Even in isolation. So how we talk to people, how we treat people, how we speak of people, *even* how we think about people, will impact our success in terms of reflecting Jesus Christ. This may seem really daunting, but the goal is to strive.

The better at it that we become, the more wholesome and strong our relationships with people will be, which can only have a positive impact on our church communities, which should provide new pathways of invitation; and as we reflect Christ, so will it become easier for others to do so. That in itself may help empower them to encounter God, and encourage them to want to drive ministries that are relevant, redemptive and resonating. It’s all connected.

In conclusion, what I want you to take away from this exploration is that we need to keep our focus on the right things. We need to focus on what matters most, on the true meaning of the church and of the Restoration, and not be mired in false reasons (some of which I’ll explore in a future blog). We are *not* called to count how often we reference or quote a unique aspect of the Restoration.

If we can help people know that God is not dead, if we help empower them to encounter God, and reflect Christ, if we can provide ministry that is redemptive, that is relevant, which resonates, and if we can be invitational, nurture holistic relationships and build sacred communities, we will prove that yes, we are listening.

Encounter God! ~ Reflect Christ!

QUIT COUNTING!

On many occasions I've had the opportunity to chat with members of other Latter Day Restoration factions (often including members of the Restoration Branches, the Temple Lot, LDS, and others). Many of these conversations have left me with the impression that a lot of members of these other groups tend to think that the purpose of the Restoration is to be the Restored Church. I also happen to know that a lot of members of Community of Christ feel the same way. However, this is in fact not the case.



Let me state at this early point that I do believe with all my heart that Community of Christ is the Restored Church; and that the very concept of the Restoration is integral to our existence.

However, we do not exist to be the Restored Church. The Restored Church does not exist to be the Restored Church. Or to be the Restoration. Say it anyway you want, but the simple fact is, we were not restored to be the Restored Church. That is, quite simply, just what we happen to be, as a result of the Restoration having taken place.

This might be a bit of a mind snap, so let me try to clarify what I mean. What is “the Restoration” a restoration of? Or, what is the Restored Church a restoration of? Quite simply, Christ's church. That's it. However, its an important distinction that I feel is often overlooked.

I'll say it again. We were not established to be the Restored Church. We *are* the Restored Church, but we were created to be, and are, first and foremost, “the church”. If you have traditional Restoration beliefs, you have to accept this as valid.

I feel this all warrants highlighting, because, as I mentioned above, many people in Latter Day Restoration factions (again, including a large number of us) tend to overlook this foundational truth.

And it generally manifests in this manner: Counting.

Counting how often Restoration concepts are used. In the conversations I've had, many people have said to me "Your church (Community of Christ) is no longer a Restoration church" or "We are ceasing to be a Restoration church", etc.

The same rationale for such thinking is presented over and over: "Your/our publications and your/our World Conference sermons seldom, if ever, quote from the Book of Mormon, early sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, or the Inspired Version of the Bible; or reference Joseph Smith Jr., the sacred grove, the restoration of priesthood authority, etc."

This kind of thinking always makes me smirk, because I know with all my heart that we are not called to count such things. The original twelve apostles did not have the Book of Mormon. They did not have Joseph Smith Jr. They did not have the various unique features of the Restoration. Christ did not make such things the heart and soul of the church. They are not the spiritual foundation of Christ's church, nor are they the purpose for which it was created, in any era.

The church was, I suspect, established for many reasons – but not for *any* the above. The church today is meant to be a restoration of the ancient church. It is, after all, not a new church, but a restoration – a new iteration, in modern times, of the ancient church.

However, a new iteration is not a new church, anymore than a reorganization of a church does not make it a new church; and we must always remember, we are, first and foremost, the church of Jesus Christ, not Joseph Smith.

We are called to be "the church", not the Restoration. Our primary concerns should be ensuring that we are in alignment with the mission of Jesus Christ, that we are driving the Great Commission; that we are helping to further the cause of Zion by (among other things) feeding the poor, tending the sick, helping to diminish tyranny, protecting the environment, encouraging animal conservation and promoting communities of joy, hope, love and peace as we proclaim Jesus Christ.

The people who tend to count how often Community of Christ makes use of Restoration concepts or Restoration resources also tend to believe in the concept of the one true church. While this concept is no longer a focus item for Community of Christ, it is a doctrine that I personally believe in.

Yet, I find the combination of "church truists" and "counters" to be ironic because, I'm quite convinced that if the doctrine of a one true church really is of God (as I believe), then the church so recognized as the true church in the mind and will of God will be so viewed, by Him, for a plethora of reasons which will include the various causes I mentioned above (mission of Christ, feeding the poor, cause of Zion, etcetera).

If there is a true church, it will not be, in my opinion, regarded as the true church (by God) for how often it references the sacred grove. Or (ahem) priesthood keys.

It is also my conviction that any church that is obsessed with counting the usage of restoration teachings (in itself or others), or which is primarily focused on ensuring that it is the Restored Church, above all other considerations, will never be regarded by the Lord as His one true church.

In other words, once you start counting how often others reference Restoration theology, and/or become prideful of how much of a Restoration faction your own denomination is, you can kiss any claim you feel you have to being the one true church goodbye.

I don't wish to give the impression that I reject Restoration concepts, doctrines, or resources. I embrace them, I celebrate them, I use them and I believe in them.

(for an overview of my own personal beliefs, you might want to read this sermon: <http://ddonsermons.wordpress.com/2013/09/28/follow-my-commandments/>)

In fact, it is my deep conviction that our Restoration heritage is what makes us so awesome (and we are awesome).

Nonetheless, I tend to regard all of our Restoration characteristics as tools, to help us spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, to help people encounter God and Reflect Christ. Our Restoration heritage is what keeps us relevant; and we need to recognize that our Restoration beliefs resonate with a larger number of seekers.

There is just so much tremendous value in our various Restoration concepts and resources. The more we embrace them, the more relevant and redemptive I think we will be.

However, they are meant to help us drive the Great Commission, and the mission of Jesus Christ. They are not meant to be our very purpose, the reason for why we exist. Christ's mission has never been to promote the Book of Mormon, or the Inspired Version, etc. His mission has little do with such things, but as we have been reminded, his mission is our mission.

It is however not just our mission. It is the mission of all Christians, including all the other factions of the Restoration.

So, let us all work together in furthering Christ's mission, let us remember to "let contention cease" and let us stop counting!

IS GOD PETTY?

Through the wonders of modern technology and social media, I have, for many years now, enjoyed opportunities to engage in dialog with church members from all over the world. In addition, I have found myself frequently conversing with members of other Restoration denominations.

As a result of these conversations, I have noted that many members of the Restoration tradition (our church and the greater Latter Day Restoration movement) have views that seem to suggest that God is petty.



This troubles me, because God is not, in my opinion, in any way reflective of pettiness.

Ever.

The God of the Old Testament, the God of the Book of Mormon, the God of the New Testament, and the God of the modern world, as revealed in the Doctrine and Covenants, has never been, is not, and never will be, petty.

God may have said things, or done things, which, perceived through our limited human understanding, may strike us as petty. However, there is a huge difference between God's actions being perceived by us as petty, and having our own ideas about God that make him into a petty creator.

Let me try to give you an example of what I mean. I have spoken to people, both inside and outside the church, who feel that it is completely unacceptable that the church changed its name. In their view, our longer name, "The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" is the only proper name, because God gave that name to us.

Except the word "Reorganized". Which we tacked on. Without God's consent.

We already were using a name that was not divinely sanctioned. Yet that fact tends to be overlooked. If we wanted to be "true" to the name that God provided, we would not have added the word "Reorganized" to our name.

Regardless of the details concerning the word “Reorganized”, the argument remains. The rest of our longer name is what God told us to use, and therefore (so they reason), God does not support our use of the new name. At the very least, he is not pleased with it.

Some people have more serious opinions on God's response to the fact that we changed the church's name. They believe we have earned God's displeasure. God rejects us as a people. We have become apostate, etc.

I find all of these views utterly without foundation, and they trouble me because they all turn God into a petty god.

God may (and I stress the word “may”) have ever so slightly raised a divine eyebrow when we changed our name, but beyond that, I cannot accept that God was terribly concerned. The church name, after all, is a cosmetic, or administrative aspect of the church. While apparently given by God, it is not, strictly speaking, a point of doctrine. It does not pertain to remission, redemption or resurrection. It is not sacramental. It is not a Gospel principle. It is, just simply, a name.

Ultimately, everything we have is given to us by God. This includes all the blessings of life. Including friends, jobs, hobbies, etc. These are all provided to us by God. Yet, we are totally free to drop friends, seek out new jobs, abandon hobbies that we've grown bored with, etc. With this in mind, I'm not at all sure that I agree that we cannot change the name by which we are known to the world, despite the divine origin of that name, given that, again, this particular aspect of our church identity is not itself sacramental or doctrinal.

If we insist that we cannot change the name, then we do indeed make God a petty God.

Let me give you another example.

I have conversed with some people who have been very clear with me that God rejects the Independence Temple because it was not built precisely where (allegedly), God told Joseph Smith Jr. to build it. I don't know exactly where on the Temple Lot the temple was supposed to be built. Yet, I do know (from using Google Earth), it appears that our temple is approximately 88 yards away from the bottom right corner of the roof of the Temple Lot Church.

The greatest distance would seem to be between the temple and the southwest corner of the Temple Lot, which is around 205 yards. The middle of the Temple Lot suggests a possible distance of 135 yards. Whatever the magic figure is, it is clear that the distance is quite insignificant.

Yet, this is the theory: God rejected our temple. Why? Because, we did not build it where God told us to build it. So where did we build it?

A little to the right.

To be honest, I wouldn't be surprised if even God himself rolls his celestial eyes when he hears people say that our temple is rejected on account of it being across the street.

In some of the conversations I've had, some people have actually implied that the church is turning it's back on it's heritage, because we "no longer believe in the Temple Lot location".

Just a moment. The spot in question was for what now? It was dedicated for what purpose? Building a temple? I'd say it is completely ironic, if not absolutely absurd, to suggest that we have moved away from our heritage because we wanted to move forward with building the temple that God had long desired us to build!

The real desire of God on this point was that the church was to raise up a temple. For the sake of the church, and of the world. Not for the sake of a particular piece of real estate.

People need to recognize that Community of Christ lost ownership of the Temple Lot a very long time ago. So, we could not have built our temple on that piece of property. However, after a long period of time, the church did find itself in a position in which building the temple was financially feasible.

The way I look at it, when that happened, when it became feasible for the church to build it's temple, it was then faced with two choices. First, do nothing, and wait and see if one day the Temple Lot ownership might revert back to the church (which of course, could take years, decades, or never happen).

Second, we could move forward with the construction of the temple, by building it elsewhere (but still on the Greater Temple Lot). In my opinion, once it became feasible for the church to build a temple, that God had commanded us to build, for the sake of the church and of the world, the right choice was to build right away. Waiting for a day that might never come denies people the opportunity to experience the purposes for which it was intended. People who suggest that we should have waited for a day that might never come are missing the entire point of having a temple in the first place.

The great irony in all of this, as I see it, is that people who have beliefs about God that make God petty, are falling into the exact same trap as many of the Israelites living in the days of Christ.

They had become a people who were so obsessed with the Law (because it was given by God), that many of them failed to be the righteous people that they claimed to be. Christ rebuked them for this. He rebuked hypocrites on multiple occasions. He also pushed people to new understandings of God's nature.

How many times did Jesus challenge the Israelites to approach the word of God in a new manner? Enough that his examples should suggest to us that the lessons he was trying to teach the people should not be forgotten by his own church.

By clinging to ideas that make God petty, we become no different from the elders and chief priests who continually sought to confound Christ, and who ultimately arranged for his death.

I think it is also noteworthy that most Christians are already overlooking many scriptural verses. For example, the teachings of Jesus Christ include statements that recommend bodily mutilation in order to atone or prevent various sins.

However, we all know that we are all sinful, and therefore, if we all followed such counsel, we would all be maimed. Possibly to the extent that we would not be effective disciples, capable of furthering the Great Commission. So, using the reason and common sense that we have been given by God, we recognize that while Christ gave us the above counsel, we also understand that he gave us alternate means of accomplishing the same things, and these alternate means do not diminish our capacity to be effective witnesses.

Much as, though we lost ownership of the Temple Lot, God still enabled us to have the financial means to build the temple, thereby fostering the purposes for which it was ultimately intended.

I want to be clear about something. I'm not advocating that the word of God is no longer important. That is not the point of this blog at all. I'm not suggesting, nor do I believe, that we are free to alter doctrine as we see fit. Nor are we free to tweak the sacraments.

I mention this, because I can see how a person might say "well, if we can build the temple wherever we want, and change the name of the church, knowing that God is not petty, can we not then, for example, change the wording of the baptismal prayer? After all, if God is not petty, why can't we change this type of thing?"

In my own view, no, we cannot change the baptismal prayer. In this case, we are dealing with something that is sacramental. There are some things that I believe God has said, or done, to further his own purposes. There are other things that God has said, or done, that I feel he did for reasons other than directly furthering his own purposes.

God has provided the wording to be used in some of our sacraments. Sacraments were implemented for very profound spiritual reasons. We are not free to tamper with them. So, in my view, God actually has reasons for having provided the wording that he did, reasons that further his divine purposes.

Likewise, I do not believe we are free to change the Gospel. Now, let me be clear what the Gospel is. It is, to put it casually, the "Good News" that Jesus Christ brings to the world. To be

more specific, it is God's plan of salvation (for the purpose of granting eternal life), accomplished by repentance, remission, and redemption.

This understanding of just what the Gospel is, is important because we must be conscious of the fact that our entire canon of scripture does not pertain, 100% of the time, to the Gospel.

This itself is noteworthy, because sometimes when the church makes changes, we are accused of changing the Gospel. That is an absolute falsehood. The church has never changed the Gospel. The Gospel, as found in our books of scripture, reveals to us what is required for salvation and eternal life. Community of Christ has never changed the criteria. The temptation may exist to do so, as evident by the fact that the LDS church has done so, yet Community of Christ has not.

We also cannot change God's "only and true" doctrine, which is the same as the Gospel, as we learn from reading Second Nephi chapter 13 (from around verse 24 to the end).

To summarize, in my view, we cannot change God's only and true doctrine, or the Gospel, and we cannot change the sacraments.

However, I don't feel that things like the church name, or location of the temple, are the same. Yes, God may have given a location, and he may have given a name, but I suspect that such things were done for more administrative reasons. For example, there was probably some disagreement about what name the church should use. I believe that God, desirous to see such discussions closed, simply made the decision for the church – but I doubt he has sentimental attachment to it, and so, this is the kind of thing I feel we can consider altering, without divine sanction.

To be honest, I suspect that God is pleased that we realized, at long last, that we could make changes to these type of church aspects. We are, after all, his children, and we are, I hope, growing in maturity and wisdom. God must, in my view, be pleased with that shift, because, once again, God is not petty.

WHAT IS SIN?

In my personal exploration of various church issues, I have noted that sometimes people bring up the concept of sin to help rationalize their position on a given matter. Which I think is perfectly valid.

However, it then becomes needful to have a clear idea of just what we mean when we talk about



sin. When I think of sinful conduct, I tend to think of wicked deeds, great acts of evil, and deliberate defiance of God's will. Personally, I do think that such things are properly regarded as sins (whatever the specifics might be), yet, we probably would be wise to recognize that sins can take many forms, including much less villainous things. Sin is, unfortunately, by no means confined to far distant global events, historical conflicts, or the thrilling stories of Hollywood & novelists.

At a priesthood meeting that I was running one day in my congregation, I took several minutes to express my personal opinion that taking people for granted is sinful. This is something that really bothers me, as I see it happen all the time, and I am myself guilty of it. Unfortunately, also all of the time. One day, as I was frustrated with my own tendency to take people for granted, I was struck with the notion that doing so is not just something that is undesirable, not something that is just unwholesome, but, a true, actual (sinister music) sin.

Why such a strong view on taking people for granted? Well, it just seems to be so very unkind, uncaring, selfish, and occasionally harmful. It creates barriers to expressing how we feel about people, sometime about the people we love the most. So, in my view, for all of these reasons, taking people for granted is an actual, full fledged sin.

More recently, I've come to realise that taking life for granted is also a sin. Perhaps even more so. Life is a gift from God. Of all the gifts from our Heavenly Father that we experience daily, it is the greatest gift of all. Therefore, taking our lives for granted is also an actual expression of sin.

However, identifying the above as sinful does not truly help explain what a sin is. The website for Community of Christ attempts to do so with these words:

"God created us to be agents of love and goodness. Yet we misuse our agency individually and collectively. We take the gifts of creation and of self and turn them against God's purposes with tragic results. Sin is the universal condition of separation and alienation from God and one another. We are in need of divine grace that alone reconciles us with God and one another."

This definition can be found on both the [Basic Beliefs](#) page, and on the [Glossary](#) page. I think there is a lot of wisdom in these words.

However, I know that they won't resonate with everyone. In fact, a member of one of the Restorationist groups told me once that the Community of Christ definition of what a sin is was wrong.

So I asked him what he felt the proper definition of the word sin is. He told me that a sin is something that someone does, or fails to do, resulting in that person being in violation of God's law. So, if you violate one of God's commandments, you have committed a sin. According to this person's definition, this is in fact the only possible way that one can commit sin.

I think this view also has wisdom in it. In fact, I think that perhaps both understandings of what a sin is may in fact be different ways of trying to express the same thing. Though perhaps that is reaching a bit.

At any rate, I think the latter viewpoint probably resonates with a lot of church members, because it is perhaps a little more tangible. It also perhaps helps keep people more clear on just what is sinful.

Being conservative myself (or a [foundationalist](#)), I tend to think that the latter understanding of sin would be more readily embraced than the statement on the church's website. Its a more yardstick approach to the subject.

The interesting thing about such a view pertains to the conviction that a sin cannot one day cease to be a sin. I've seen or heard this position used by many people when engaged in some sort of theological chat.

However, this position is actually not correct. If we regard sin as something that violates the law, then it is indeed very possible that something regarded by God as sinful could, one day, no longer be so viewed (by God).

In fact, this has already happened.

Remember, the premise here is that a sin is doing something (or failing to do something) that is forbidden, or required, by God's commandments, the Law.

Let us consider then the consumption of pork. According to the Old Testament, God forbade the eating of pork. Doing so would therefore be sinful. Or, in other words, it would be a sin to eat pork. Eating pork was one of a whole host of sinful deeds, as recorded in our scriptures.

Yet, we read in the record left by the Nephites that the Law ended in Christ:

"For behold, the covenant which I have made with my people, is not all fulfilled; but the law which was given unto Moses, hath an end in me." –Third Nephi 7:9 (CofC 1908)

Because Christ ended the law, something that was considered sinful (eating pork), ceased to be sinful. Therefore, we know that it is indeed possible for something that was truly regarded by God as sinful, in times past, to cease to be so regarded under other circumstances.

As Christians, we should be dedicated to the truth, and therefore, we have to acknowledge, even if we really don't want to, that something can cease to be sinful.

Knowing this to be the case, how we are viewed as individuals, as Christians, as members of the Restoration, will be a reflection of how we respond to these insights – will we embrace them, or, if not, at least accept them, or will we try to ignore, or even suppress such truths?

How we deal with such a shift in our theological views will determine whether or not we will walk the road of divinely induced transformation (which will move us closer in alignment to Christ's purposes), or embark upon the road of stagnation. As one of our founding principles happens to be Free Agency, God leaves that choice to you.

Questions to Ponder

What is your understanding of sin?

How do you feel about the suggestion that something previously regarded as sinful (by God) might no longer be so viewed by Him today?

Does this concept seem threatening in any way? If so, why? Are there some sins which you feel will remain sinful forever, and others that might not? What determines this for you?

CAN GOD CHANGE? Part 1 – “To Change, or not to Change”

For many years now I have observed that one of the most common objections to changes in the church, including changes to the priesthood, is that God does not change his mind about things.

This objection is frequently used by members of Community of Christ, as well as by members of various other Restoration factions. Having encountered it so many times, I decided some time ago to explore this objection, and as a result, I have come to believe that it is flawed. If you stick with me, I'll endeavor to explain why.

The objection (that God does not change) is of course based on various verses of scripture, which do indeed state, in one form or another, that God does not change. We find some of these verses in the Bible and some in the Book of Mormon. Here are some examples:

“For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” -Malachi 3:6 (IV)



“But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.” -Psalm 102:27 (IV)

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” -Hebrews 13:8 (IV)

“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.” –James 1:17 (IV)

81 And if there were miracles wrought, then why has God ceased to be a God of miracles, and yet be an unchangeable being. 82 And behold I say unto you, He changeth not; if so, he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles. –Mormon 4 (CofC 1908)

“For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity.” –Moroni 8:19 (CofC 1908)

These verses, read in isolation, do indeed seem to suggest that God cannot change his mind. The question then becomes “are there any verses that state that God can change His mind?” As far as I know, the answer to that question is “no”. I have yet to find a verse in our Standard of Authority that states that God can change.

Yet, if we are being honest with ourselves, we have to acknowledge that sometimes there are statements in scripture that seem to say different things. This means there is another factor to consider.

You see, an honest, in-depth exploration of this question, “can God change his mind?” must not be limited to simply looking for verses that inform us if God can change. If we form our conclusions simply on the existence, or lack of, verses that say “God can change”, then we are ignoring the bulk of our sacred canon, for probably very self-serving reasons.

We need to look for a verse that, while perhaps not saying that God can change his mind, nevertheless serves as an example of God doing just that; and the reality is, there is such a verse:

109 And it came to pass that the Lord of the vineyard said unto the servant, Let us go to, and hew down the trees of the vineyard, and cast them into the fire, that they shall not cumber the ground of my vineyard: for I have done all; what could I have done more for my vineyard? 110 But behold, the servant said unto the Lord of the vineyard, Spare it a little longer. 111 And the Lord said, Yea, I will spare it a little longer: for it grieveth me that I should lose the trees of my vineyard. –Jacob chapter 3 (CofC 1908)

The above passage is part of a message from God given to the prophet Zenos, in which God reveals to Zenos his interactions with the nation of Israel, which he compares to an olive tree in

a vineyard (v30, 31). Therefore, the “lord of the vineyard” is God, who as we see above, has changed his mind.

Some people may not accept this scripture as a valid example of God changing his mind based on the fact that God’s plan is “likened” to a tame olive tree. God reveals his plan for the House of Israel through an elaborate metaphor.

However, the key point here is that the metaphor is given to Zenos by God himself, for the purpose of simplifying (for the sake of Zenos’ understanding), God’s interactions with Israel. With this in mind, it is not plausible that the character of the Lord of the Vineyard, made up by God to be representative of God, would say or do something that God himself would not.

There is however an even more important reason why the “god cannot change” objection is flawed.

It is actually not necessary to prove that God can change his mind. We don’t need to advocate that position whatsoever.

All that is required is that we can demonstrate that God can bring about change. That he can change various aspects of his creation, including the rules of his church & priesthood, to suit his purposes, as he deems needful.

Doing such does not need to mean that God has changed his mind, as it is very plausible that such changes were always part of God’s plan from the beginning.

God may be unchanging, but we must understand that this is in reference to his nature. He is divine, he is eternal, he is loving, he is all powerful, he is wise, and he is just. These aspects do not change.

Yet, these unchanging aspects of God’s nature do not prevent God from bringing about change, from making alterations, from causing transformation.

I would also submit that change is itself a divine trait. Again, God does not, in my opinion, change in regard to his immortality, power, wisdom, perfect justice, etc; but change must be something that is itself reflective of God, because change is a key characteristic of every aspect of creation.

You see, God is a god of transformation, and transformation is simply another word for change.

Questions to Ponder

1. How does the question “Does God change?” relate to the belief that we are created in God’s image?
2. Does God need to change to bring about change?
3. Accept for the moment that God can change things. What would be a good reason to do so?

CAN GOD CHANGE?

Part 2 - The Consistency of Change

God transforms people for the better. When you consider what transpires in the scriptures, or when you consider the history of our own church, you can see that what is happening, all the time, over and over, is God working in the hearts of people to transform them, by giving them hope.



God’s prophets, forged in the wilderness by encounters with the divine, were transformed. It was the transformation that these people experienced that enabled them to do what they did, to become what they became. Moses was not simply sent back to Egypt. First, he was forged by God in the wilderness. Joseph Smith Jr. was not simply told one day to go dig up the buried plates. He was spiritually prepared over many years via angelic visitations, and his experience in the grove. Both men were transformed by God.

Here is another thought. Transformation is what we offer to the world. Our goal as disciples of Jesus Christ is to help bring people into a closer relationship with God. Sometimes that means to help establish a relationship where none previously existed.

That is a transformation. We talk, all the time, about how people have had their lives transformed in wonderful ways by the church.

When people are baptized, or confirmed, they are transformed. So you see, we are in the business of transforming people.

Even Jesus Christ experienced transformation. We call it the Transfiguration; and let us not forget, like Moses, he also had his time in the wilderness.

Transformation is what John the Baptist offered. He preached repentance and baptized people for the remission of sins. That is one form of transformation. Through this remission,

people learned to forgive themselves, to release themselves from their own guilt. That is a second transformation and no doubt such transformations would result in developing new outlooks regarding how a person should live, treat one another, worship God, and so forth.

After John, Jesus Christ also preached repentance. He preached about the Kingdom of God. He challenged how people understood the Law and the Prophets; he encouraged people to totally transform their lives.

He sought to turn people away from wickedness, replacing it with peace, mercy, love, compassion, and charity, once again, just to name a few.

What we learn from all of this is that transformation is at the heart of our purpose. It is at the heart of responding to God's call.

It is at the heart of every aspect of existence. The world continually transforms itself with the passing of each season.

The people called into the wilderness were transformed by God's guidance. The messiah himself was transformed through the Transfiguration. Transformation is everywhere. It permeates everything, and everyone throughout all creation.

The people who enter into a covenant with Jesus Christ are transformed; and like I said a few moments ago, we are, essentially, in the business of transforming lives.

And we do this, because the worth of souls is great in the sight of God. Its all about Transformation. That is the message of Hope that John the Baptist brought to a nation, and the message of Hope that Jesus Christ brings to the world.

Understanding this, is it not folly to suggest that God does not change from time to time? Not himself, but what he made, including his priesthood. If God does not change things from time to time, he would not be consistent with his own creation.

Questions to Ponder

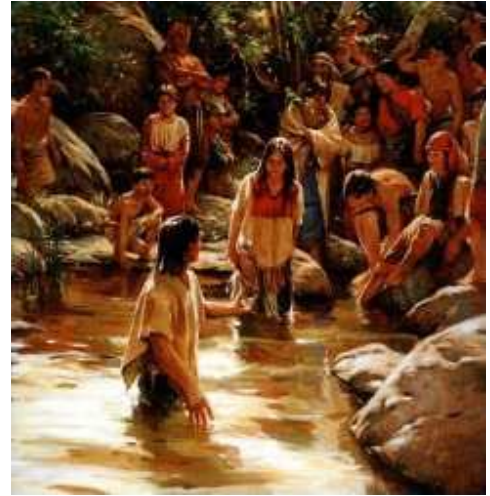
1. What was your initial reaction to seeing examples in our scriptures and history that God has changed things? 2. Which change most surprised you? 3. How comfortable are you with knowing that God can change things?

CAN GOD CHANGE? Part 3 – What Has Changed?

If we are going to advocate the notion that God can bring about change, we should be able to present some examples from our sacred canon and perhaps also from our own history. Do such examples exist? Absolutely!

To begin with, let us consider the following verse from the Book of Alma:

“And Alma established a church in the land of Sidom, and consecrated priests and teachers in the land, to baptize unto the Lord whosoever were desirous to be baptized.” - Alma 10:103



Compare the above passage with Doctrine & Covenants Section 17:11e:

“but neither teachers nor deacons have authority to baptize, administer the sacrament, or lay on hands”

So, we see that in the ancient church, according to the Book of Mormon, teachers could baptize. Yet, in the restored church, as indicated by the Doctrine and Covenants, they cannot. God changed what the office of teacher was authorized to do. This represents a change made by God to the priesthood.

Consider now an example of God changing a sacrament: From Alma 9:

43 And now it came to pass that Alma took Helam, he being one of the first, and went and stood forth in the water, and cried, saying, O Lord, pour out thy Spirit upon thy servant, that he may do this work with holiness of heart. 44 And when he had said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he said, Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead, as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world. 45 And after Alma had said these words, both Alma and Helam were buried in the water; and they arose and came forth out of the water rejoicing, being filled with the Spirit.

Pay particular note to the words Alma used in verse 44 when he baptized Helam, keeping in mind that the above passage clearly indicates that Alma was filled with the Holy Spirit. This strongly suggests that what Alma did, and said, was done by the prompting of God. Now compare to:

“And now behold, these are the words which ye shall say, calling them by name, saying: Having authority given me of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.” -Third Nephi 5:25

We should also give some consideration the office of prophet. In the modern church, the prophet is always a member of the priesthood, and is itself an office of priesthood, to which the successors of Joseph Smith Jr. are ordained. This reflects a further change. In the ancient scriptures, the role of prophet was not an office of priesthood. It was simply a divine calling that some people had, but it existed outside the priesthood (though no doubt some members of the priesthood also served God as prophets).

Another very important change pertains to slavery. In the Old Testament, slavery was tolerated by God:

44 Both thy bond-men, and thy bond-maids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bond-men and bond-maids. 45 Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land; and they shall be your possession. 46 And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bond-men for ever; but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigor. -Leviticus 25 (Inspired Version)

However, we read the following in Section 98:10g:

“Therefore, it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another.”

This demonstrates God reversing a prior divine position. This would be, in my own opinion, an example of something that was not previously viewed by God as a sin, becoming so.

Regardless of that question, the point here is that God, for whatever reason, openly tolerated, and seemed to even command, or at least encouraged slavery -the treatment of some people being regarded as property by other people; only to then reverse that position in 1833 – several centuries after the Torah was recorded. During the interim, the world changed.

In 1993 Herald Publishing House printed a book called “Having Authority”, by Gregory A. Prince, which informs us on page 43 that in the early days of the Restoration, only elders could ordain. However, in 1831, this authority was extended to priests.

Likewise, this same book informs us on page 54 that bishops were originally part of the Melchisedec priesthood, but eventually became part of the Aaronic priesthood (this may be an unfamiliar concept for many readers, however, strictly speaking the office of bishop belongs to the Aaronic priesthood, and is properly filled by descendants of Aaron. However, since

proving such descent is problematic, the Lord has indicated that high priests can serve in the office of bishop).

Questions to Ponder

1. In what way was Christ changed in the wilderness & during the Transfiguration?
2. What positive impact might there be in our attempts to bring about positive transformation if we understand that God himself is open to change?
3. What is the purpose of change?

CAN GOD CHANGE? Part 4 - A Changing Priesthood

The previous examples of God making changes are all extremely helpful to demonstrate that God does, from time to time, alter things. However, I think perhaps the best case for such a theory relates to the Aaronic priesthood. It is here that we can perhaps best see dramatic changes made by God to what he had already established.



In ancient scripture, God decided to bless the Twelve Tribes of Israel with a priesthood. He selected a member of the Tribe of Levi to be the first high priest, and that man was Aaron, the brother of Moses. Aaron's sons became the first priests. The rest of the Levites, who were not descended from Aaron, were also given religious duties, but the priesthood itself was restricted to Aaron and his descendants only. Therefore, while other Levites had religious responsibilities only Aaronites were part of the priesthood.

It is important to keep in mind here that to be a Levite, you had to be descended from Levi, and to be part of the priesthood, you had to also be a descendant of Aaron.

The entire Aaronic priesthood would eventually become dormant. However, we know from our history that John the Baptist restored the Aaronic priesthood to the world when he conferred it upon Oliver Cowdery & Joseph Smith Jr. It is important to highlight that our heritage teaches us that this was not a new priesthood named in honor of a prior priesthood. Though dormant, the priesthood is without end, and what was granted to Oliver & Joseph by the Lord through John was a restoration of what already existed previously.

But what of those ancestry requirements? Clearly, in the Restored church, they have been abolished. Any member of the church in good standing, who is called of God, can be, according to the laws of the church, ordained to any office of the Aaronic priesthood, regardless of heritage. One does not need to be Jewish.

Another interesting alteration pertains to the progression of the Levitical “priesthood”.

While people may speak of the “Levitical priesthood”, as a term of convenience for those Levites in the Bible who were not Aaronites, they did not form a priesthood in the same sense as the Aaronic priesthood. The latter was viewed as “the priesthood”. Levites who were not Aaronites were not part of the priesthood, despite having their own religious roles to play.

Yet, Section 104:1a teaches us that in the restored church, the Aaronic priesthood includes the so-called Levitical priesthood:

“There are, in the church, two priesthoods; namely: the Melchisedec, and the Aaronic, including the Levitical priesthood.”

Even if we wanted to argue that the non-Aaronite Levites did constitute an actual priesthood, the fact remains; it would have been distinct from, and not part of the Aaronic priesthood. You had to be an Aaronite to be part of the Aaronic priesthood.

However, based on Section 104, we see that the Levitical “priesthood” is to be regarded as an actual true priesthood, and is now to be viewed as being part of the priesthood of Aaron, despite the prior Aaronite restriction.

We should also look at the composition of the Aaronic priesthood. In ancient scripture it consisted of priests and a high priest (to avoid confusion with the Melchisedec high priest, I’ll term this role as “chief priest”).

The chief priest was not simply an elevated role, but what we would consider an office of priesthood, because he was consecrated to his position, with scripturally defined duties.

It is important to note that in the New Testament and in the Book of Mormon, no such office exists. There are high priests mentioned in both the New Testament and the Book of Mormon, but they are “after the Order of the Son of God” i.e., they are of the Melchisedec priesthood.

Now, we could argue that bishops, first introduced in the New Testament church, are simply chief priests of the Aaronic priesthood with a new designation. Yet, in the entire nation of ancient Israel, all through it’s history, including when it was a kingdom, there was only one chief priest at a time. However, in the early years of the church, which had a vastly smaller population, there were multiple bishops. So, either bishops are a new office, with chief priests

being discarded, or they are the same office, re-named, but reflective of a further change (many vs. one).

Then we have to deal with deacons and teachers. No such offices exist in the Old Testament. Teachers are found in the Aaronic priesthood as it existed amongst the Nephites, but deacons are still absent.

We might suggest that deacons and teachers represent the non-Aaronite Levites. However, the non-Aaronite Levities were classified into three groups: the Gershonites, the Kohathites and the Merarites. So, if we go with that theory, then we are forced to acknowledge that something is missing today.

However, the real meat of this topic pertains to the duties and responsibilities of the Levites and the priesthood.

Each of the three types of non-Aaronite Levites had specific religious duties to perform, as indicated in the following passages from Numbers chapter 3, Inspired Version:

25 And the charge of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of the congregation shall be the tabernacle, and the tent, the covering thereof, and the hanging for the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, 26 And the hangings of the court, and the curtain for the door of the court, which is by the tabernacle, and by the altar round about, and the cords of it, for all the service thereof.

30 And the chief of the house of the father of the families of the Kohathites shall be Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. 31 And their charge shall be the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars, and the vessels of the sanctuary wherewith they minister, and the hanging, and all the service thereof.

36 And under the custody and charge of the sons of Merari shall be the boards of the tabernacle, and the bars thereof, and the pillars thereof, and the sockets thereof, and all the vessels thereof, and all that serveth thereto, 37 And the pillars of the court round about, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords.

The duties of the Aaronite priests were to perform various sacrifices and burnt offerings, each for a specific purpose. The chief priest presided over the day of atonement, and had various other unique duties to perform.

However, when we read Section 17 of the Doctrine & Covenants (or any other section), we utterly fail to see any harmony of duties between the modern Aaronic priesthood, and those of the ancient Aaronites and Levites (though there are a few commonalities between the modern priesthood and the Aaronic priesthood amongst the Nephites).

Quite simply, none of the duties of the Gershonites, the Kohathites the Merarites, the priests or the chief priests of the Bible exist in the current Aaronic priesthood, and none of the responsibilities of the latter were held by the former. In fact, the primary duty of the Biblical priests of Aaron was specifically abolished by Christ:

“And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings; and ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit.” –Third Nephi 4:49

Its worth pointing out that not only were the duties of the priests of Aaron changed, the Lord actually stated that he would no longer accept what he previously commanded His people to provide: sacrifices and burnt offerings, the entire tradition having been “done away” with. Again, this demonstrates God changing something that He had previously implemented.

What we see from all of this is that God does indeed alter things to suit his purposes, as circumstances warrant. God may not change, but the world does, and therefore, the needs of the people, and of the church, change, and thus, God changes the priesthood and the church to better support the needs that they have.

Indeed, a comparison of the Israelite and Nephite Aaronic priesthoods sets a precedent for differences to exist at the same time.

The priesthood of Israel had priests and chief priests, and were assisted by the Levites. The priesthood of the Nephites had priests and teachers and lacked Levites. Not just Levitical temple workers, but members of the Tribe of Levi. Of which the Aaronic priesthood had to be part of. This means that in fact, there were two different divine policies operating on the Earth at the same time. In the Old World, you had to be an Aaronite to be part of the Aaronic priesthood. In the New World, you did not. Two different rules, at the same time, depending where you were.

Here is another example of this:

*“And Alma established a church in the land of Sidom, and consecrated priests and teachers in the land, to baptize unto the Lord whosoever were desirous to be baptized.”
-Alma 10:103*

During this point in time, the Aaronic priesthood in Israel still existed. Yet, we can be sure that the duties of the Aaronic priesthood in the Old World did not include performing baptisms for the sake of the church of Christ.

We need to remember that from Aaron to Christ, the Aaronic priesthood existed in Israel, with the duties and rules outlined in the Old Testament. Yet, the Aaronic priesthood in the days of

Alma, in the New World, existed at the same time as the Aaronic priesthood in the Old World, and the above verse is a clear indication of the two versions of the priesthood having different rules in operation at the same time, by design of God.

The priesthood of Israel operated directly under God. The priesthood of the Nephites operated under the direction of the Melchisedec priesthood.

This last fact is itself a change for another reason. There were no Melchisedec high priests or elders presiding over the Aaronic priesthood of Israel (in Israel). However, the Nephites (who were also Israelites) had such high priests, and they also had elders, and the priests and teachers were subordinate to them.

In other words, the Israelites living in Israel, between Moses and Christ, did not have the Melchisedec priesthood – but the Israelites who were also Nephites living in the New World did! Again, this proves that God may change things not only over time, but in different areas – having different rules for the same thing, as circumstances warrant.

Clearly God does, and has changed things over the ages. This should not really surprise us. It is important to remember that Christ established His church for the sake of mankind. Therefore, we should not be surprised to see God being willing to modify the church to better meet the needs of mankind.

Questions to Ponder

1. What other examples of changes being made by God can you think of?
2. Do you agree that major changes should only be made by God?
3. Understanding that God does indeed change things from time to time, what concerns might you have about this, and what excites you?

WHY DOES THE CHURCH HAVE TO CHANGE?

As I'm sure most people are aware, change does not always come easily. Or, it is not always easily accepted. This is particularly obvious within the context of the church.

When I look at my own willingness to accept changes in the church, I find examples of occasions when I was reluctant to do so. I'm particularly resistant to changes that can be construed as doctrinal in nature. I tend to have conservative or [foundationalist](#) perspectives regarding church doctrine. I cherish the grove experience, the need for a restoration, the Book of Mormon, the Inspired Version, the sacredness of our revelations, etc.

Consequently, changes in the church have not always been easy for me to accept; and I know that I am not alone. There are numerous church members who struggle with church changes because, just like me, the traditional teachings of the church strongly resonate with them.

I know that there are some people who are really annoyed that the church has scheduled its next World Conference for June instead of April. I've conversed with a couple of people about this, and I was surprised how annoyed they are over this latest change. For myself, the dates of World Conference don't really mean a great deal aside from personal preference. The dates are not reflective of church doctrine. They do not concern church theology. They are purely administrative.



However, I came to realize that for those people who were bothered by the change of month, that the real issue was the fact that the church was, yet again, making another change.

Tampering, once more, with tradition. It is very true that the church has seen a lot of changes back-to-back in what is, actually, a short period of time. We might think its been over a long period of time, but when we consider the entire history of the church, it really has been a lot of changes, often dramatic, in a condensed period of time.

Consequently, some people ask “why does the church have to change?” or “what was so wrong with the way things were?”

The ironic thing is, the more conservative a person is (in a church context), the more they ought to realize that the church has always experienced change. We just aren't really conscious of it, because we only see and experience the church, in a direct sense, through the filter of our own personal association with the church.

In other words, we can only directly experience the church in the context of our own lifetime. I don't truly know what church was like when my parents were kids, because I myself was not yet alive. Young adults living right now cannot truly understand what church was like when I was a kid because at that point, they were not alive.

However, a large number of us have fond memories of church as we experienced it in our youth. Perhaps it is simply in our nature to yearn for the days when church was like it was when we were teenagers. Yet, the reality is, the church has never been the same, it has never been static. The “way” church was when I was a teenager was not the same as it was for my parents. However, the church as it was when they were teenagers would have not been the same as the church existed when my grandparents were teenagers.

The church is always in flux, and a foundationalist approach to our history reveals that this has always been the case.

You see, the revelations contained in our Standard of Authority (not just the Doctrine & Covenants, but also those found within the Book of Mormon and the Inspired Version – both of which are also revelations), reveal to us that the church has existed in multiple iterations.

We tend to regard the church as having been first established in Palestine, directly by Jesus Christ (or at least, by the original twelve apostles under Christ's direction).

While Christ did establish the church in Palestine, it was not the first time that the church was established. Our Restoration scripture reveals that prior iterations of the church existed.

The first such iteration was in the era of Adam. We are told in Genesis Chapter 6 (Inspired Version):

52 And he called upon our father Adam, by his own voice, saying, I am God; I made the world, and men before they were in the flesh.

53 And he also said unto him, If thou wilt, turn unto me and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, which is Jesus Christ, the only name which shall be given under heaven, whereby salvation shall come unto the children of men; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, asking all things in his name, and whatsoever ye shall ask it shall be given you.

Further down the chapter, we read the following:

67 And it came to pass, when the Lord had spoken with Adam our father, that Adam cried unto the Lord, and he was caught away by the Spirit of the Lord, and was carried down into the water, and was laid under the water, and was brought forth out of the water; and thus he was baptized.

68 And the Spirit of God descended upon him, and thus he was born of the Spirit, and became quickened in the inner man.

69 And he heard a voice out of heaven, saying, Thou art baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost; this is the record of the Father and the Son, from henceforth and forever;

Based on the above, we see that the church existed among humanity in the earliest generation of our sacred history.

When did this iteration come to an end? We don't know for sure. The above verses were referenced by the prophet Enoch, so presumably the church existed in Enoch's lifetime. Though we can only speculate, it seems that the first iteration did not exist beyond the flood.

The second iteration of the church came into existence quite sometime after the first iteration became dormant (I estimate around 16 centuries later). The second iteration was established by God through his servant Alma, in the New World. We know this from what is recorded in the Book of Mormon, 9th chapter of Mosiah (RLDS 1908):

*46 And again, Alma took another, and went forth a second time into the water, and baptized him according to the first, only he did not bury himself again in the water.
47 And after this manner he did baptize every one that went forth to the place of Mormon: and they were in number about two hundred and four souls;
48 Yea, and they were baptized in the waters of Mormon, and were filled with the grace of God:
49 And they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward.*

The third iteration of the church was what we usually regard as the foundation of the church: Christ's work as recorded in the New Testament.

The fourth iteration takes us back to the Nephites. Here, in the Third Book of Nephi, Christ, after appearing to the Nephites, seems to re-establish the church amongst the Nephites. Its not quite as explicitly explained as previously, but it seems that the church had "broken up" prior to Christ's manifestation, resulting in the need for it to be organized once again.

Finally, we come to the fifth, and current iteration of the church, established, as always, by our Lord, but this time, through Joseph Smith Jr. This iteration is now over 180 years old, which is still comparatively young compared to the prior iterations.

What do we learn from all of this? Well, the key question that we need to ask is this: "Do we truly believe that these various iterations of the church were identical to each other?"

The answer is clearly "no". Let us consider again the various iterations that have existed:

- 1st – Established by the Lord through Adam (Old Testament church)
- 2nd – Established by the Lord through Alma (1st Nephite church)
- 3rd – Established directly by the Lord (New Testament church)
- 4th – Established directly by the Lord (2nd Nephite church)
- 5th – Established by the Lord through Joseph Smith Jr. (modern church)

As we consider these various iterations, it becomes clear that many distinctions exist. It is difficult to say just how many there are, but for the purposes of this discussion, we really don't need an exhaustive list. The following suffice:

- 1) The very purpose of the first iteration seems distinct from all others. It does not seem to have operated in the open, to publicly proclaim Christ. This logistically makes sense, as doing

such prior to the birth of Christ on the same landmass on which he would eventually be born would likely be problematic.

So, what then was the purpose of the 1st iteration? We can speculate all we want, but it does not really matter. The key point here is that the latter iterations were more open and public about proclaiming Jesus Christ than the 1st iteration apparently was.

2) The first iteration lacked an Aaronic priesthood. While some might argue that it may not have been needed in that very early era of human history, the fact remains, all future iterations are different from the first iteration of the church for at least this one reason. When the Aaronic priesthood was implemented in future iterations, that represented a transformation from the oldest example of the church. Enoch might have said “Hmmm...there was no need for a second priesthood when I was a kid...why do we need one now?”

3) The Aaronic priesthood as it existed in the 3rd and 4th iterations of the church, which for a time existed simultaneously, were not structurally the same. In the New Testament church, there were deacons, priests and bishops. It is not precisely clear if teachers were regarded as an actual office of priesthood.

In the 2nd Nephite church, there were priests, but no deacons, and no bishops. Also, there were indeed ordained teachers. So, different offices operating in the Aaronic priesthood, at the same time, depending in which part of the world you were.

4) According to the Doctrine & Covenants, bishops are properly part of the Aaronic priesthood, not the Melchisidec priesthood. Also, they are to be literal descendants of Aaron. However, as proving such heritage is problematic, the Lord has provided us, in our modern revelations, an escape clause: high priests can function in all other offices, therefore, a high priest can be ordained and serve in the office of bishop.

The key point here though is that bishops are of the Aaronic priesthood. Yet, when we review the New Testament, it seems clear that bishops were very senior members of the church, presiding just below the apostles. Why would members of the Aaronic priesthood be senior to high priests and elders?

Clearly, bishops were operating in the New Testament church with an authority and responsibility distinct from other iterations of the church. Clearly, they were called by God to serve as the needs of the people required at the time.

5) Looking at the priesthood as a whole, the New Testament seems to have had the following offices and roles:

apostles, bishops, deacons, elders, evangelists, high priests, pastors, priests, seventies & teachers (pastors, and possibly teachers, being a role vs. an office).

The Nephite church seems to have had the following offices:

Elders, priests & teachers (high priests seem absent from the 2nd Nephite church, which fact is itself a distinction from the 1st Nephite church).

An additional role is found in the existence of 12 elders set apart to provide something approximating apostolic ministry without being true apostles. This seems to have been a one shot arrangement.

When we compare the two versions of the priesthood (in iterations 3 and 4), including pastors and teachers, we see a total of 12 forms of ministerial leadership in the New Testament church, but only four (including the 12 apostolic elders) in the 2nd Nephite church.

6) When we look at the modern church, we continue to see evolutions:

- a. Seven (and then ten) quorums of seventy instead of just one.
- b. Prophets as an office of priesthood*
- c. Presidents as an office of priesthood**
- d. Patriarchs as an office of priesthood***
- e. A First Presidency.
- f. Apostles no longer form the senior administrative & spiritual body.
- g. A presiding evangelist.
- h. A new office, in the form of high councillor****
- i. A Standing High Council
- j. Bishops function as financial leaders instead of presiding over the church.

*While there have always been prophets, they were not previously an office of priesthood. This is therefore a new office that exists only in the modern church.

**Prior to the modern church, presidents, as an office of priesthood, did not exist. This is therefore a new priesthood office.

***There is no priesthood office of patriarch in ancient scripture. Patriarchs did exist in the Old Testament, but they were not an office of priesthood. Therefore, it is a new office of priesthood existing only in the modern church. It was also combined with the office of evangelist. There can be little doubt that Old Testament patriarchs and New Testament evangelists, if told that one day their roles would be merged into one office would have found that to be a rather strange change. I suspect many would deem it a very unlikely, implausible and awkward change.

****While the church does not tend to currently use the term high councillor, and inducts people to the standing high council via setting apart instead of ordination, its status as an office is based on Doctrine and Covenants 129:7b.

What do we learn from all of these examples of how the various iterations of the church were different from some or all of the other iterations? Well, quite simply, we learn that the church has never existed in one static form. The church has always experienced divinely guided change.

As we have seen here (and especially in my prior blog *Can God Change?*) such alterations are not limited to just new additions to the church, but, as we have seen, sometimes something already established by God is changed by God in the future, or changed by God in another part of the world (divinely implemented regional distinctions).

So, can we, especially those of us with foundational church beliefs, truly claim that the church cannot or should not change, given that, based on our three books of scripture, it is clear that the church has always changed?

In fact, it would seem that if we don't experience change, that would be inconsistent with our own history.

Change is not our enemy. Change is not counter to God's will. However, perpetuating a delusion or clinging to such a falsehood (that the church cannot be changed by God) is clearly in alignment with the designs of the adversary, and in opposition to God's revelations.

Questions to Ponder

1. Why do we sometimes fear change?
2. What do we learn from comparing the Aaronic priesthood in the Bible with the same priesthood in the Book of Mormon?
3. What positive changes have you witnessed in the church?

DARE WE ASK?

"Its not our place to question God"

Have you ever heard someone say that, or something like that? Have you said it yourself? It comes up a fair bit when we dig deep into issues of doctrine or theology. Why did God do that? Why did God say this?



In my experience, replying to questions about why God said or did something with the response of “its not our place to question God” is the great cop-out. It means “I don’t want to answer” or “I don’t have an answer” or (perhaps most likely of all) “I don’t want this question to be explored” – and that means the question is perceived as a threat.

However, I believe that it is our place to question God. When I say that, I don’t mean in some sort of defiant or clinical sense of just making lists of questions to bombard God with, as perhaps a symptom of our own restlessness. We are not called to sit in judgment of God. However, that in no way means that if we are truly curious about something, that we can’t ask God for clarity.

The way I look at it, God is our parent. He loves us as a parent loves his or her children. Yet more so. He wants us to evolve, and learn. Therefore, I truly believe that he wants us to ponder things, reason through things, and, when we are unsure of something, to ask. Yes, this even pertains to the scriptures. In fact, especially so.

When you think about it, the only shared experience we have with God is what is revealed in our sacred canon. Therefore, its seems unlikely that God would take offense to his children asking God about what God has deemed fit to reveal to us through his prophets.

We also need to remember that God is not petty. What kind of supreme being would cling to the position that we should not ask him questions? What is God afraid of? Its my conviction that God fears nothing. Nothing threatens God, therefore, he has no reason to dread our questions.

If we look to the scriptures, we see that there is actually a precedent for asking questions. Time and time again, prophets and other disciples of our Lord have asked questions. We find these stories in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Therefore, if we follow the model and pattern of scripture, we should not be resistant to asking God questions.

We may not get an answer. Perhaps it is enough that we discuss our questions amongst ourselves. When we engage in dialog about various issues, we may find ourselves asking various questions. God may not respond, but we can perhaps ponder the questions together, and strive to reach a plausible understanding together.

Questions to Ponder

1. Do you believe it is appropriate to ask God questions? Why?
2. Why do we ask God questions?
3. How might our questions be answered?

FEMALE ORDINATION – DID WE MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE?

Part 1 – Pondering Paul

Since the reorganization took place, I think its probably unlikely that any issue has created more division in the church than female ordination. Section 156, the revelation that made female ordination possible, was presented to the church in 1984, by Prophet-President Wallace B. Smith, great-grandson of our founding prophet, Joseph Smith Jr.



April 2014 marks the 30th anniversary of the World Conference that sanctioned female ordination. After thirty years, people are still divided. New denominations have been organized, and many people have been born and raised in factions of the Restoration that claim descent from Joseph Smith III, but which reject the ordination of women. So the division continues.

Did we make the right choice? The answer to that question is of course “yes”. Yet, given the resistance to it exhibited by so many people, I have often wondered why so many members and former members of the church reject it.

A common objection I’ve been given for female ordination are two verses from the writings of Paul. These passages are as follows:

“Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to rule; but to be under obedience, as also saith the law.”

-1 Corinthians 14:34 (Inspired Version)

11 Let the women learn in silence with all subjection.

12 For I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. - 1 Timothy 2:11, 12 (Inspired Version)

Let us explore each of the above passages, and as we do so, we would do well to remember the words of Nephi:

*“For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them, and writeth them for the learning and the profit of my children.”
–Second Book of Nephi, 3:19 (CofC 1908).*

So, let us ponder, as Nephi counsels, the scriptures. In First Corinthians, Paul states that women should keep silent in the churches, and further elaborates that it is not permitted for them to rule, but to be under obedience, as stipulated in the law.

In my opinion, using this scripture to justify the non-ordination of women is a violation of the principle of [“sacramental truth”](#). If we do so, we are not being fully honest with ourselves.

You see, we do not enforce this scripture in an absolute sense. If we did so, we would not permit women to speak or sing. Now, it could be said that the directive to be silent is understood to mean “do not preside”, or something like that.

It is interesting to compare the verse as found in the KJV with that found in the Inspired Version:

“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law.” (KJV)

In both versions, there are essentially four components.

From the King James Version:

- 1) Let your women keep silence in the churches;
- 2) for it is not permitted unto them to speak;
- 3) but they are commanded to be under obedience
- 4) as also saith the law.

From the Inspired Version:

- 1) Let your women keep silence in the churches;
- 2) for it is not permitted unto them to rule;
- 3) but to be under obedience,
- 4) as also saith the law.”

It could be argued that the change of the last word in component 2 of the KJV rendition, from “speak” to “rule” (as it appears in the IV), is a clear indication that what Paul was really talking about was a restriction of a woman’s role in the church, and not a prohibition of her talking or singing.

And yet, the colon in the KJV was changed to a semi-colon. This suggests that the verse is meant to be understood as a directive to women to not speak, re-enforced by a further directive to not be in positions of leadership.

This of course than means that if we do wish to use this verse to prevent women from being ordained, we are, as noted above, not being honest with ourselves, since we are not fully enforcing it, since we are not choosing to compel women to remain silent in church.

However, we are still left with either a prohibition from speaking to rule, or from speaking whatsoever.

What is the motivation of this counsel? Why does Paul tell us to let our women keep silent?

Another interesting change is the drop of the words “they are commanded” from the third component. The KJV seems to suggest that the directive to keep silent is a divine commandment, yet the Inspired Version removes this portion of the verse.

The fourth component talks about “the law”. What law? Presumably, the law of Moses. This is, normally, what is meant when someone in the ancient scriptures talks about the law.

However, the Law of Moses is made up of 613 individual laws, or commandments. Not one of these states that women are to obey men. Therefore, the law that Paul was speaking of must have been a secular law, rather than part of the Law of Moses. This is reasonable, as, in order to properly manage an entire nation, it would seem needful that the elders of Israel would have to devise additional laws for their civilization, as it grew from 12 tribes wandering in a desert to an entire nation. Furthermore, as Judah transformed into the Roman-conquered realm of Judea, it of course would have found itself subject to Imperial laws.

Here is something else to consider. Who was Paul speaking to when he gave this counsel? The members of the church in Corinth. In Greece. It seems clear that most of our books of scripture were intended to be read by as many people as possible, however, can we say the same for the epistles that Paul wrote? I’m sure Paul does not object to other people reading his epistles, beyond the intended audience of each, but the fact remains, he wrote specific messages to different clusters of the church.

Some of the things that Paul wrote were spiritual truths. Consider the following:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

—Galatians 3:26-28 (Inspired Version).

This is a spiritual truth that would be applicable to all members of the church. This is not something that we would say is only true for the Galatians.

However, 1st Corinthians 14:34 is not a spiritual principle but administrative guidance, and it is entirely possible, given that it appears in an epistle directed to a specific church community, that it was provided because of a local Corinthian law, violation of which may have been problematic for the church in that area.

It seems most likely that Paul's intent was to ensure that female members of the church were not in violation of a Roman law, or of a Jewish secular law, or a Corinthian law. I'm sure that Paul was motivated by the following reasons: genuine desire to keep female members of the church from getting into trouble, and a desire to ensure that the authorities did not have an additional cause to take action against the church.

The real point of course is that the modern church is not subject to imperial law, Jewish law, Corinthian law, or, for that matter, the Law of Moses, which Christ rescinded when he visited the Nephites.

Therefore, the words of Paul to the Corinthians is a flawed means to oppose female ordination.



The second verse is, once again, as follows:

11 Let the women learn in silence with all subjection.

12 For I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. -

1 Timothy 2:11,12 (Inspired Version)

First Timothy was written by Paul to provide counsel and guidance to Timothy while he labored in Ephesus, which is, interestingly, also in Greece. Therefore, once again, the motivation behind Paul's words may have been the result of local law and/or custom, along with a desire to keep both the women of the church, and the church community in Ephesus, as safe as possible.

However, it does look like Paul had another motive for saying what he said, for the chapter continues with these words:

13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

This strikes me as Paul's personal position, and not the result of divine revelation. It seems it is his way of rationalizing his prior statement.

Note that he states in verse 12, "For I suffer not a woman to teach..." He does not state "the Lord has said..." or some such statement. This is Paul's own view, based on his own convictions.

It is also worth noting that his own basis, the order of creation, etc., for saying what he did, seems a little muddled (which further suggests that this portion of his letter was entirely of himself).

To begin with, he says that because Adam was formed before Eve, women should learn in silence, and not rule, etc. However, this seems like a rather flawed and petty reason to permanently suppress women, [and as I outlined in a prior blog, God is not petty](#). For every man who excels in leadership, there is also a woman who does likewise. And if in a given community or organization, there is a woman who is a better leader than all available men, is it reasonable that she should be overlooked because Eve was created after Adam?

To be honest, that just seems absurd, and I doubt Paul was moved by God to write what he wrote.

We also have to acknowledge that Deborah ruled, as the fourth judge of Israel. Therefore, Paul's opinion actually clashes with a precedent already set.

Paul also says that Eve, but not Adam, was deceived. This makes no sense. Adam, not yet having tasted of the fruit, was innocent, therefore, he had no motivation to disobey God. Therefore, he must have been deceived. It is utterly implausible to suggest that Adam knew what he was doing, and just decided to disobey God simply for the fun of it.

Furthermore, the Bible states that Adam was with Eve when she was herself deceived:

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it became pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make her wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." –Genesis 3:11 (Inspired Version)

The ramifications of all the above are clear. 1st Timothy cannot be used as a reasonable and plausible method of opposing female ordination.

I can almost hear one particular objection to my perspectives: "Does the Bible not state that all scripture is of God?"

Yes and no. Here is the verse you might be thinking of, as found in the King James Version:

*“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”
-2 Timothy 3:17 (KJV)*

However, here is the same verse as found in the Inspired Version:

“And all scripture given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (Inspired Version)

The changes made between the KJV and the IV are very significant, and, given the nature and authority of the Inspired Version in the church, the simple fact is this: we cannot claim that all scripture is given by God.

Therefore, when we acknowledge this fact, and ponder Paul's words as we've done above, we can clearly see that using them to oppose female ordination is flawed.

FEMALE ORDINATION – DID WE MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE?

Part 2 – Scriptural Basis

Since the verses from Paul cannot be used to oppose female ordination, what other reasons might someone use to do so?

Well, I have often been told that there is no scriptural basis for female ordination. However, the lack of a scriptural basis in no way invalidates the validity of female ordination. At least, not within the Restoration movement, which teaches us that God still reveals his will to the world.

Come to think of it, we do not need a scriptural basis, given that there is no scripture that states that women cannot be ordained. Previously, we reviewed the two verses of Paul often quoted to defend a male only priesthood. However, as we have seen, using these two verses is flawed, and problematic. They do not, as some seem to believe, authoritatively invalidate female priesthood. When we take the time to explore them both, and apply reason to each, we see that they do not support male only priesthood in the modern church whatsoever.



We must add to that the fact that there isn't any verse in ancient scripture which states that women cannot be ordained. All we seem to have are personal opinions based on rather sketchy interpretations of scripture, rooted in rather dubious views of scriptural context of the verses in question.

So, we don't actually need a scriptural basis, and we don't need modern revelation to sanction female ordination. However, we have the latter (which of course becomes the former).

Granted, opponents of Section 156 reject it as a scriptural basis whilst maintaining that there is no scriptural support in ancient scripture. Yet, I'm not sure it is accurate to say that there is no scriptural basis or precedent for female priesthood in our ancient scriptures.

Deborah was the fourth judge of Israel. While that does not mean she was a member of the priesthood, it does prove that women did have positions of leadership and authority. There were also several female prophets. It seems totally implausible to me that God would permanently forbid women to be ordained, but would be willing to deliver prophetic messages to his people through various women.

And what did the female prophets do with their messages? The whole point of a prophet is to share with the community what God had revealed. Some prophets did so by writing down their words. But, it seems that many, including some of the female prophets listed in scripture, did not do so. How then did they share with the people what God had revealed to them? Quite probably, by talking to some sort of gathering of people. In other words, they very likely engaged in a form of preaching.

So, while it may be true that there are no clear, indisputable examples of women serving in the priesthood of Israel or of the church, in ancient scripture, we can say that there is a basis for the eventual ordination of women, as we know that women did, on occasion, have positions of leadership, and also were blessed with spiritual gifts, and very likely preached.

Paul himself delves into this. Consider the following:

1 I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea;

2 That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a succorer of many, and of myself also.

3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus;

4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks; unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

7 Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

12 Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labor in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which labored much in the Lord.

13 Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.

14 Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren that are with them.

15 Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them.

16 Salute one another with a holy salutation. The churches of Christ salute you.

Phoebe is described as a “servant of the church”.

Priscilla is described, along with her husband Aquila, as a helper “in Christ Jesus” She is generally viewed as a missionary, and some scholars feel that she was one of the Seventy. Her name is mentioned six times, always with her husband, and on three occasions, her name is listed first.

Given the culture and era in which the books of the New Testament were written, it would have been quite easy for the authors to have simply ignored Priscilla. However, her inclusion in the work of the Lord was deliberate and noted multiple times.

One such verse regarding Priscilla is particularly interesting:

“And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue; whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.” –Romans 18:26 (Inspired Version)

Again, the author could have simply ignored Priscilla. In fact, he probably would have, had she not contributed anything. Yet, it seems clear that she did, and the author was moved to make note of it.

This is not some sort of trivial reference. Priscilla was engaged in a form of preaching; and she was teaching. In fact, it states here, in the Inspired Version, that she was expounding (about God).

Section 17 of the Doctrine and Covenants states repeatedly that one of the duties of the priesthood is to expound. They are also called to teach and preach.

Therefore, it seems clear that Priscilla was performing some of the duties of the priesthood, exhibiting leadership and providing instruction.

Instead of having a problem with this, Paul seems perfectly OK with her conduct, which further suggests that his counsel in First Corinthians and First Timothy was intended to have a limited scope.

Also of interest is Section 42, which offers the following:

“Again I say unto you that it shall not be given to anyone to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, except he be ordained by some one who has authority”

Here we see that preaching and building up the church are the domain of priesthood only. Yet, Priscilla functioned as a missionary. This implies that she was in fact a member of the priesthood.

Verse 7 states that Junia was “of note among the apostles”. While I personally don’t interpret this as “prominent among” but rather as “well known to”, the praise is significant. Again, we see a woman who Paul (and, if we accept his words), the other apostles deemed to be, in a positive manner, a noteworthy member of the church.

Verse 12 introduces us to Tryphena, who is listed before her male associate, and we are told that she labors “in the Lord”.

Verse 15 has Paul asking his audience to “salute” several people, including two women, Julia and the sister of Nereus.

From all of these references, it should be clear that women served in the ancient church in vital roles including as preachers and missionaries, performing functions assigned to, and even reserved for, members of the priesthood. It is therefore a denial of God’s truth to cling to a position that ancient scripture does not, to any degree support the possibility of female priesthood members.

We can also find a scriptural basis in Section 24 of the Doctrine & Covenants. Although this revelation does not mention priesthood, and while we have no record of an ordination having taking place, this revelation strongly suggests that Emma Smith was called to the priesthood.

FEMALE ORDINATION – DID WE MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE?

Part 3 – The Role of Women

A third common objection to female priesthood members in the church is the role of women. In other words, some people feel that women should not be ordained because serving in the priesthood would run contrary to, or somehow conflict with, their roles that they inherently have, simply by virtue of being female.



This objection is, quite simply, insane.

While it is true that first world societies once greatly limited what women could do, those days are mostly long gone. Women can vote. They can drive. They can be doctors, lawyers, etc. How can we possibly let women do all these things, despite their inherent female roles, but then use the latter as a reason to say that they can't be members of the priesthood?

Think of it this way. If we can support a woman being a family doctor, would we object to a woman being a dentist? If we support a woman being a police officer, would we object to a female pro golfer?

We cannot say that it is ok for a woman to have a career, and then pull the rug out from under her and say "you can't be in the priesthood – that would take away from your duties and/or responsibilities as a woman."

We also need to ask, just what are these duties and/or responsibilities that women have that priesthood would impair? The answer is always the same: raising children.

Women, according to some, should not be in the priesthood because being in the priesthood would interfere with them raising their children properly. But they can have jobs and careers.

Of course, my position might be countered by saying that a career is ok, because that is one role, in addition to motherhood, which is therefore manageable. But, add priesthood on top of a career, and the woman has even less time to provide to her children.

But what about fathers? Aren't fathers expected to be good fathers? Are they not also expected to do their part in raising children? They are out there working every day, and they are serving in the priesthood, attending meetings at night, visiting the sick, traveling to stake conferences, etc. If its ok for fathers to do so, why not mothers?

What about mothers who don't have a career? Would they not then have ample time to be mothers and priesthood at the same time? What of women who can't have children? What of mothers who have already performed their sacred duties with distinction, and now have an empty nest? What about couples who decide not to have children?

How can we possibly have a blanket statement that says women cannot be ordained because they are supposed to be mothers, when we consider all of the above factors?

Another consideration is Paul's perspective on marriage. Paul seems to suggest that unmarried people both male and female, will be able to devote themselves more fully to the Lord, than those who marry. His stance implies that for those who are able to resist temptation, it is more desirable to remain unattached, and devote oneself more fully to the Lord.

Obviously, Paul would not regard childbirth outside of marriage as an appropriate objective, therefore, since he seems to advocate remaining single and devoted more fully to God as preferable to getting married, it would seem that the former is a higher calling and more sacred function than motherhood.

I can hear the rebuttal: “But, if a woman does fall in love, and decides to get married and have children, then her motherhood should not be distracted by ministry”. But you cannot forbid all women from joining the priesthood for the sake of those women who opt to have children, especially considering that remaining childless & unmarried, devoted to God, seems to be a higher calling.

The real factor in this area is of course that the objection is simply an opinion: “You can’t be ordained as that would take away from your role as a mother”.

There is no scripture that states that a woman cannot be ordained because such would diminish her role as a mother. Again, as noted above, there are so many cases where this would not apply and be ridiculously unfair (infertile women, empty nesters, etc.) – but, even more important, the objection is just an opinion, which is not a very sound basis for establishing a doctrinal position, especially when such an opinion casts God as unjust.

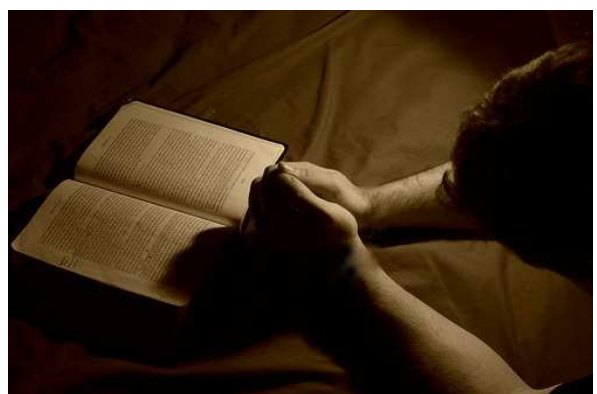
The opinion is of course flawed. When we take the time to consider, and ponder (as Nephi counsels us), the scriptures, and note the aforementioned female missionaries, who are we to object? If women in the Bible could travel from place to place, be missionaries, be church leaders, etc. etc., how can we possibly object to female priesthood on the basis that ordaining them would somehow clash with their femalehood?

FEMALE ORDINATION – DID WE MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE?

Part 4 – “Disjunctive Revelation”

Another objection I have sometimes come across, regarding female ordination, is something called “disjunctive revelation”. This is a fancy term that has apparently been invented by those who left the church in the wake of Section 156, in an attempt to give their positions some sort of credibility.

(using Google, I did a search on this term, for the exact phrase, and found that there were only three pages of results, all of which were tied to the



Restoration movement – but I digress)

So what is meant by the term disjunctive revelation? Well, simply put, it is a revelation viewed as being in contradiction with a prior revelation, which renders the more recent revelation false (not of God). Another way to look at it would be to say that each new revelation must be in complete harmony with all previously accepted revelations in order to be regarded as authentic (divine). The “new” cannot contradict with any of the “old”.

The problem with this concept is that there is no basis for it, and it defies reason, logic, common sense and is just not plausible. The Lord is perfectly free to make adjustments to “the rules” as He deems fit.

Objectors tend to feel “but you can’t have two revelations say opposing things about a given issue, with both being true...one must be false”.

However, this totally ignores the most basic fundamental principle of creation: things change. It also ignores the fact that God does things according to his own purposes.

In the Book of Mormon, God directed Lehi, his wife, his children, his friend Ishmael, and Ishmael’s family to leave Jerusalem, and to flee into the wilderness. This was not a popular choice with some of them, and no doubt it required some prep. work, and some effort to actually accomplish.

But, eventually, the group found themselves camping out in the wilderness, beyond the comforts and familiarity of their city. Why did they go? Why did they undertake this ordeal? Because God revealed to them that this was His will.

Later, God revealed more of his will to them. He directed some of them to return to the city. Did Lehi and his companions regard this instruction as a disjunctive revelation? Did Nephi say to his father Lehi “but you told us that God directed us to leave the city – therefore, this new revelation, calling for some of us to go back to the city, must be false”. Naturally, he said no such thing.

What was God’s will? In the first case, God’s revelation to Lehi indicated that God’s will was for all of them to leave the city. Then, it would seem that it was His will for some of them to return. A contradiction. How can both revelations that Lehi received be true?

They are both true because they represent different divine purposes. Clearly, God had a reason for taking Lehi and Ismael and their combined families out of the city, and of course he had a reason for sending some of them back.

The contradiction only exists if we read scripture in an isolated format, without context. For example, if we read scripture in this manner:

Verse 1: And God told Lehi and his family to flee the city.

Verse 2 And God told Lehi to send his sons back to the city.

We might scratch our heads and say “well that does not seem to make a lot of sense”

But, when we explore the context of seemingly contradictory scriptures, and understand the purpose of why the original scripture was provided, and honestly seek to do the same with latter revelations, we may just come to recognize that there really is no issue.

The reality is, God has made many changes, as we can see in my prior blogs [“Can God Change?”](#) and [“Why does the Church Have to change?”](#) – we accept these changes, therefore, we can accept other changes – especially when there really is no prior scripture that legitimately opposes female ordination.

On this latter point, some people might cite some of the “revelations” circulated by people other than the prophet-president of the church. However, church law has, since the era of Joseph Smith Jr., indicated that revelations to the church can only be received through the prophet-president. An individual may receive a personal revelation, providing guidance for the wellbeing of his family, but any revelation that seems intended to offer commentary on church doctrine, and/or with the intent of being shared with others, must be rejected as false.

Regretfully, it seems that the only real reason that people have to object to female ordination is simply the fact that they don’t want it to be, for what are most likely chauvinistic reasons, valid; and this quite simply violates the principle of [“sacramental truth”](#).

Pondering Same-Sex Issues Within a Conservative Framework

*“For my soul delighteth in the scriptures, and my heart pondereth them”
–Second Nephi 3:29*

While female ordination may have caused the most division in the church (Community of Christ), I tend to think the most controversial issue the church has dealt with since the reorganization of



1860 is that of same-sex marriage and the ordination of people in same-sex relationships.

Consideration of, and action taken in regard to, the above same-sex issues has caused a considerable amount of turmoil for many individuals for several years now. Most recently, several conservative members have questioned their ongoing involvement in the life of the church, and many have resigned from the priesthood or ceased active membership. Some have formally rescinded church affiliation.

Before going further, I want to offer an overview, as I understand things, of where the church is today regarding these issues, which the church had been wrestling with in some manner for probably at least 30 years. I certainly can't claim to have any idea when such an exploration truly first began, and I doubt anyone can.

However, eventually, there was enough support for same-sex marriage and the ordination of people in same-sex relationships that some areas of the church began submitting legislative motions for consideration of the delegates attending the church's bi-annual (now tri-annual) World Conference. The intent of such motions being to sanction same-sex marriage, and/or the ordination of people with same-sex partners.

None of these motions were passed, being ruled, for one reason or another, out-of-order, or referred to a committee for further study. Yet the interest in both issues never faded, and as World Conference 2010 approached, multiple motions were submitted seeking to change our policies on these issues.

It was quite clear, and had been for a very long period of time, that the issues were not going to go away. Motions could be ruled out-of-order at every World Conference, but more would be submitted, and the potential for division was on the rise.

During World Conference 2010, Prophet-President Stephen M. Veazey presented a new revelation that was accepted as authentic by the delegates in attendance, and which therefore became Section 164 of the Doctrine & Covenants.

This new revelation provided instruction on how to handle these extremely controversial topics, which are, incidentally, topics that cannot even be openly discussed in some nations that our church is established in. The very issue of individual safety of church leaders and members in those nations became a serious cause for concern.

Section 164 provided the church with authority to hold national conferences, so that the membership of those nations in which the church is established, could, if there was sufficient interest, vote on accepting the ordination of people with same-sex partners, as well as same-sex marriage (if legal in the nation in question, or an appropriate substitute if not) for that nation only.

Therefore, the World Church would not have a single policy, but national policies, on a nation-by-nation basis, again only for those nations that had enough interest to hold a national conference (strictly speaking, the national conferences do not change policy, they vote on whether or not they wish to make a recommendation to the church leadership to change policy).

In June 2012 Australia became the first nation to hold a national conference, followed later on that month by Canada. In April and October 2013, the United States and the United Kingdom also held national conferences. All have recommended that the church leadership modify existing church policy on these issues, for the nations concerned.

Statements pertaining to the outcome of these national conferences can be read here:

<http://www.cofchrist.org/AustraliaConf/outcomes.asp>
<https://www.cofchrist.org/CanadaConf/outcomes.asp>
<https://www.cofchrist.org/usaConf/outcomes.asp>
<http://www.cofchrist.org/BritishIslesConf/>

At the time of this writing, the results of the most recent conference, held in the UK, are still being reviewed by church leadership, but they have supported policy changes in Australia, Canada and the US, and all three of those nations have had interim policies go into effect, permitting people with same-sex partners to be ordained, and permitting the church priesthood to solemnize marriage for same-sex couples where legal (and to perform an alternate ceremony otherwise).

The journey has been a very long one, and is not yet over. There have been celebrations and crushing defeats, for members of both perspectives.

I know that my own journey has not been in any way nearly as painful as I know it has been for many other members of the church. But it has been frustrating at times. I've explored the issue over many years, and have written several documents voicing my objections to policy changes, and I have responded to the claims made by many other people why they feel it is ok, pointing out the various flaws in their arguments (which even now, still exist).

In opposing these issues, I know that I have, from time to time, hurt some individuals, and I sincerely regret that, and I apologize, once again, for having caused people pain. The awareness that I had contributed to someone's turmoil forced me to ensure that my perspectives, methods, and general opposition were presented diplomatically, in what I hope was motivated not by anger but by love.

This was, I have to confess, not always easy. But, it became very clear to me that when people respond to one another, over doctrinal issues, in a hostile manner, no one's

perspective will ever be taken seriously (also, there is just no need for it). Consequently, I became very determined to do my best to try to keep the peace with, and between, as many people as possible.

As the national conferences approached, it became very clear to myself as well as I'm sure most members of the church, that, regardless of how the voting went, there would be some very unhappy members, who would feel a tremendous amount of anger, frustration, sadness and a sense of both broken trust and of betrayal.

Throughout this whole process, of moving forward with (and now beyond), these initial national conferences, a primary concern for me has been church unity; and, being a [foundationalist](#), I've been concerned, in the wake of the national conferences, for the well being of those church members who were disappointed by the results. The results have had a negative impact on church unity, which would have been the case no matter what.

And that just plain sucks.

I don't want to see anyone leave the church. I don't want to see people lose faith. I don't want people to be thrust into a spiritual crisis. But that is what has happened, and we always knew that it would, again, regardless of how the vote went.

Had each National Conference voted to not make policy changes, a lot of our church members who have fought for many years to sanction same-sex marriage and the ordination of people with same-sex partners would themselves now be in a state of some sort of spiritual agony. Some would have left the church. And again, that would have been tragic.

But, even with full knowledge that people were going to get bruised along the way, the church had to take action, and it has done so. Now the challenge before us is to help heal those who have been spiritually wounded by the outcome of the National Conferences. As before, my desire is church unity. I don't want anyone to leave or become inactive over what has transpired, but that is happening, congregations are closing, and many people who have been lifelong members of the church feel abandoned by it; and that is not just.

For well over a year now I have been pondering over and over the fact that there does not seem to be a middle ground where these issues are concerned. Obviously, those who support policy changes are unlikely to be satisfied with anything less than the policies being changed.

However, those who reject policy changes also seem unlikely to change, because these people tend to be, like myself, conservative in terms of our positions regarding church doctrine, history, and approach to scripture.

I have noticed that there is some confusion regarding just what makes someone, in the context of church, conservative. And I feel that it is helpful in discussions like this to have an understanding of just what that means, and therefore, I encourage you to read the following blog:

<http://ddonblog.wordpress.com/2013/10/07/the-new-conservatives-part-one/>

In that blog, I outlined what I believe to be some of the more common “cardinal convictions” that conservative church members have – as well as what I personally view to be some of the “constraining customs” that conservative church members have, along with a hope for how we can move forward in our approach to church life.

As a traditionalist or conservative church member myself, the beliefs outlined in the above blog are not just what I feel to be shared by other conservative church members, but they also of course happen to be my own beliefs; and I do not apologize for them.

Prior to the US National conference, I saw some discussion on the internet about these issues, and the concern that conservative church members would likely vote against the motions. One person responded “well, then we need to spend more money on education”.

This troubled me, because it occurred to me that, in all likelihood, the vast majority of liberal church members do not truly understand why conservative church members cannot support policy changes.

This is what prompted me to write the “New Conservatives” blog posted above, to help show the world, as I see it, what some of our positions are, and why those views present difficulties with accepting policy changes.

Let me try to give you an example. Leviticus 18:22 states:

“Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is abomination.”

Because of my convictions, I believe that Moses was a real person, and that he wrote the Torah, and that the things he presented as having come from the mind and will of God really did come from God. Therefore, I believe that God, in some manner, moved Moses to write the above words.

Because of what I believe about Moses, scriptural authority, etc., no amount of scriptural acrobatics will be effective in making me view the above words in a different manner.

This is bolstered of course by the fact that, again, as a foundationalist, I believe in the authority and divine initiative behind the Inspired Version of the Bible, which the above verse is in fact taken from. In other words, not only are these words found in other Bibles, but they were preserved in the Inspired Version.

It is for reasons such as these that I think for a large number of conservative church members, making a policy change is not possible, because it clashes with what we believe God revealed to Moses as reflective of God's mind and will and which were confirmed as such by their inclusion in Inspired Version, which we uphold as having been the result of divine revelation, the purpose being to restore lost content *and* to correct mistakes.

So we are once again left with no middle ground. We have deadlock, and, sadly, some conservative church members have or are becoming inactive and leaving the church, as they feel that there is no alternative.

Yet, I still believe in the sacred story of our church, and I believe that God is with us, and continues to reveal his will to us, and that a solution must exist, and that if we take the time to ponder, pray, and study; that solution will be revealed to us, and we can remain united, and those of us who are conservative can continue to be active, and yes, even passionate members of the church - without sacrificing our belief in scriptural authority, etc.

And I want to be clear about something else here for a moment. I'm an active, and passionate member of Community of Christ! When I talk about my faith in our sacred story, and my belief that we remain fully that church that God established through Joseph Smith Jr., I am talking about Community of Christ!

Even though I'm traditional and conservative in many ways, when people ask me what church I belong to, I *do not* say "The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" – I'm not one of those people who refuses to accept the name change, or who believes that in some way, we are not the same church. I love the old name, it has a lot of meaning for me, but I don't need to use that name. We are Community of Christ, and we are the same church, organized in 1830, reorganized in 1860 and renamed in 2001.

Returning to the deadlock, I believe that I may have found that solution that I knew God was guiding someone to discover. The solution that allows for the church to remain united, but does not negate my foundationalist convictions.

Like I said above, I truly believe that God did move Moses to write the above words, as found in Leviticus 18:22. That has not changed. And, what those words mean, has not, in my opinion, changed.

However, it is my opinion that God has changed. Or rather, God changed his mind.

Or perhaps (to prevent people from having heart attacks or brain aneurysms), I believe that God has made a change to the rules, or what we are to regard as sinful. Essentially, I believe that it is no longer an abomination for a man to lie with another man. That was once true, according to what we regard as the mind and will of God, but it is no longer true!

Given that we tend to think of God as being unchanging, I know the above will require an explanation. The best way for me to present that explanation is to direct you to a couple of my other blogs:

Can God Change?

<http://ddonblog.wordpress.com/2014/01/22/can-god-change-part-1-of-4/>

and

Why Does the Church Have to Change?

<http://ddonblog.wordpress.com/2014/01/31/why-does-the-church-have-to-change/>

Once you've had a chance to digest the above blogs, I hope you will understand that God does in fact make changes as he deems appropriate.

I also think that now might be the ideal time to direct people to the following blog regarding the principle of "sacramental" truth (which includes the call to be honest with ourselves):

<http://ddonblog.wordpress.com/2014/02/24/sacramental-truth/>

If conservative church members are being fully honest and truthful with themselves, as the above blog challenges us to be, then we *must*, based on the blogs about God changing, accept that, if we are being true to our Restoration scriptures and doctrine, accept the fact that God does indeed make changes.

But of course, the obvious objection would be "even though we now understand and accept that God can change things, we have to hold to the position that anything that God indicated as sinful will always remain sinful."

However, that view is also not correct, as outlined in:

What is Sin?

<http://ddonblog.wordpress.com/2014/01/05/what-is-sin/>

So, we have seen that it is possible for God to change things, and that it is possible for God to remove something from his list of what is sinful.

However, I suspect that some people would suggest that in the case of same-sex relations, God would not render them un-sinful because it is disgusting and obscene. However, these are human perceptions.

God, however, is a divine being who is infinite in scope and I suspect does not flinch or cringe when people of the same gender fool around. I do not believe that such conduct offends God. What offends God is when we choose hatred over love.

Yes, God has a divine plan. And I do believe that the heterosexual sex drive is part of that divine plan. But the plan is for the benefit of mankind, not for God. People who are born with a homosexual orientation are born that way through no fault of their own. If they decide, based on that no fault aspect of their identify, to pursue relations with people of the same gender, they are exercising free agency, which is of course a foundational principle of the Restoration, for which I cannot see God rejecting or condemning them for, just as I can't see God rejecting or condemning someone who decides not to have children.

And if we feel that God does become offended, and that he hates those who have relations with people of the same sex, then we make God petty, and, as discussed in this blog, God is not petty:

Is God Petty?

<http://ddonblog.wordpress.com/2013/12/28/is-god-petty/>

This approach to the same-sex issues enables those of us who have struggled with the results of National Conference to accept the policy changes without having to reject our Restoration heritage and convictions. I can still believe that Moses was real, and that God was the source of what is recorded in Leviticus 18:22, I can still accept that it was, for a period of time, deemed by God to be an abomination for a man to lie with another man. I can still accept the divine authority of the Inspired Version, I can still accept the Book of Mormon, etc.

In fact, by accepting that God can change, we become more aligned with our Restoration theology, because accepting what I've outlined in the blogs I wrote about God changing requires a deeper acceptance of various concepts found only within our Restoration scriptures.

However, there are other questions that I'm sure some people will ask. For example, if God wanted us to regard same-sex relations as abominable in the past, what was his reason for wanting us to have that view, and why does he no longer require us to have that view now?

Such questions take us into the realm of speculation. I have some ideas, some theories, but they will have to wait for a future exploration, or perhaps I'll leave that discussion to people who are wiser than I am. But, I do think God had his reasons for what he did in the past, just

as I believe he has his reasons for steering us in a new direction today (just as he had his reasons for establishing other things, only to change them later).

The other obvious question I'm sure people will ask is "but how do we actually know that God has made the change that you suggest?" After all, just because we can accept that God can make a change, and that such a change can even involve something previously regarded as sinful to no longer be so viewed today (something previously stated as being abominable no longer being required to be so viewed today), how do we know that this is in fact what God is moving us to understand?

We can be assured that he has done so by virtue of Section 164 and the Words of Counsel received in April 2013. Clearly, if God did not wish us to change our views, no such counsel would have been received.

Of course, many conservatives will respond "but I reject those revelations as authentic" – and you would, if you believed, as I did that, God could not change things; but now we know that he can. Now we know that there is no scriptural hindrance.

When Section 164 was first presented, I struggled with it for a very long time. But I felt duty bound to do what the church asked: to read it, study it, pray upon it, discuss it, etc. So I did. A great deal. After doing all of that for sometime, I decided to take out my highlighter, and underline everything in it that I objected to.

Then I had another idea. If I was going to be fair to this document, I felt that I should not start my highlighting exercise by focusing on the negative. So, instead, I forced myself to begin the process of looking for anything that I felt I liked.

To my surprise, there was some stuff that I liked - some stuff that I really liked. And yes, there was a lot I did not like. But, I continued to pray, and to study, and found, after my deliberate exercise of looking for the positive stuff, that I could not reject the document as false. I became convinced, and remain so, that it is an authentic revelation from God.

This did not mean I accepted same-sex marriage, etc. Nope. Not at all. I felt God had his purpose in what was given to us, but that we who are conservative, had a duty to still fight against policy changes.

In April 2013, I attended World Conference, and was present in the conference chamber when the Prophet-President shared the April 2013 Words of Counsel. Again, I felt, after letting those words rest with me for a while, that they really are of God.

Then it all came together. We have two revelations that demonstrate God making a change, and we have Restoration scripture that reveals to us, when we take the time to study it and

ponder it deeply, as Nephi counsels us to do, that such revelations are not problematic, God can make changes, and he can even change what we are to consider sinful.

What I did struggle with in 2010, when Section 164 was first presented, was why the revelation was not more direct. Why did it not simply say that we no longer had to view same-sex relations as abominable?

I believe that the answer to that lies within our own humanity. It is easy to imagine the knee jerk reactions that such a declaration would have caused. There would have been no study, no praying, no pondering, etc., by a huge chunk of our membership, myself included. We would have been dealing with another Section 156 exodus.

The brilliance behind Section 164 and the April 2013 Words of Counsel is that they force us to ponder things on our own. They force us to study, pray, consider, digest, and explore. Not just the documents themselves, but scripture in general, along with our Restoration theology, and our own personal positions and biases and even our own desire to be honest with ourselves.

This is what I've striven to do, and what has enabled me (with God's help) to find a solution in a conservative Restoration context where none previously seemed plausible or even logistically possible.

It is my hope that other conservative church members will, after reading this document, along with the rest of my [ZionBound](#) series, come to understand that we do have a place in the church still, a very important place, and we can continue to have our [foundational](#) beliefs and convictions, we can continue to celebrate and sing of Zion and of the Restoration features that we love and cherish so deeply, and most importantly, we can remain active and passionate and generous members of Community of Christ, assured of its divine leadership, its divine mission, and its divine call for this church to be a spiritual home for all people, where everyone is treated equally, and with love, charity, mercy, and compassion.

I know that many conservative church members will still struggle with this issue. Being able to accept same-sex marriage, etc., requires a significant shift in our understanding of God, scripture, the church, etc. It also requires us to take a sharp view of our own reasons for why we struggle with these issues in the first place.

If, after reading this blog, you feel that you cannot, at the very least, accept same-sex marriage and the ordination of people with same-sex partners as acceptable to God, then I would like to challenge you to read my entire [ZionBound](#) series.

But don't just read it on the web. Print the whole series out. Read the series carefully. Read it more than once. Highlight stuff. Look up the verses quoted. Pray about the issues. Talk about it.

If, after doing that, you still cannot accept my conclusions as valid, then I have another challenge for you. Ask yourself what the real issue is for you. Why do you truly object to such things? Because, having eliminated scriptural roadblocks, if we still refuse to accept that God can be ok with people being in same-sex relationships, then we need to seriously explore why we can't accept it. Have we been honest with our real reasons; were we just using scripture as an excuse? Do we have personal biases and prejudices?

The fact remains, as Christians, as members of the Restoration, as members of Community of Christ, as disciples of Jesus Christ, our primary concern should be to be in alignment with his will, and we should strive to ensure that our principles reflect his, without inventing them for him, nor striving to force them to match our own views.

In my exploration of [female ordination](#), I made the point that some people, no matter how many times you counter their objections to it, will continue to oppose it, ultimately, for no other reason than the simple fact that they just don't like it. They just don't want it.

This unfortunate reality will, I have no doubt, have it's counterpart with regard to same-sex relationships. If we still oppose same-sex marriage when there is no plausible, logical, *or* scriptural reason to do so, then our objections cease to have merit, and are revealed as being irrational. When that happens, we fail to reflect God's unconditional love; we undermine the principle of [sacramental truth](#), become subject to fear and hysteria, and cling to views fostered by the adversary, moving not closer to, but further away from, our Restoration heritage, that teaches us that God can, and indeed has (often), changed things up.

We need to ask ourselves, in the spirit of full truth and honesty, do we want this to be wrong? And if the answer is "yes", we need to seriously re-think what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

So where does all of this leave me? Well, I've spoken a lot about truth and honesty, so, I need to be honest and truthful now. I'm not ready to perform a same-sex marriage myself. I'm not sure I'll ever be willing to do so.

I've come to believe and accept that God now fully supports same-sex marriage, and this entire blog, and, to some degree, much of this [ZionBound](#) series has been my exercise in making a case for showing how this is not only possible, but exactly what I believe to have happened (God making a change on how we are to view same-sex relationships). Yet, it feels like uncharted territory for me.

I've opposed the same-sex issues for so long, that it just sort of runs counter to my mindset to want to perform a same-sex wedding or march in a pride parade. That is just not who and I am, and I don't feel the need to apologize for that.

I think for me (and this may be, as I think about it, an obstacle for many people), I just hate having to acknowledge the fact that I was wrong. In a sense – not in actual truth – but in a sense, it sort of feels like everything I held to be sacred truth has turned out to be totally wrong – and indeed, many of my beliefs, my deeply held convictions, on this particular subject, which I was so completely sure of, really were wrong. You don't really come to terms with that, or feel at peace with that, over night.

Nevertheless, I'm of course willing to listen and talk to anyone who is also struggling with these changes, and their own responses to them. It is my hope and prayer that this exploration will be helpful to many people around the world, because, as I stated earlier on, one of my primary concerns is to help conservative church members remain active, and regain their passion. In the end, it's all about unity. We are all brothers and sisters, we are all part of this sacred family, we are all called to be more compassionate and loving, to be disciple of Jesus Christ, and we need to start acting like we are.

To close out, I offer the following two scriptures.

"Wherefore, brethren, seek not to counsel the Lord, but to take counsel from his hand." –Jacob 3:14

*"Let contention cease."
–Doctrine & Covenants Section 134:7*

PS: No one got to me.