

Episode 7

Mormon Identity

REVELATION AND DISCERNMENT

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NARRATOR: Welcome to Mormon Identity, a 30 minute talk radio program that addresses church topics important to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Our host is Robert L. Millet professor of Religious Education at Brigham Young University.

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ROBERT MILLET: We welcome you to Mormon Identity, I'm Bob Millet your host, with me today is Professor Brent Top a member of the Church History and Doctrine facility at Brigham Young University. Welcome Brent.

BRENT TOP: Thank you.

ROBERT MILLET: Today our topic is revelation and discernment. Specifically we want to talk about how to know if a supposed revelation is from God. I'm reminded maybe to start us off Brent, of a marvelous statement, a sobering statement from the Prophet Joseph Smith when he said "nothing is of greater injury to the children of men then to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the spirit of God."

BRENT TOP: That's what I've characterized before as an occupational hazard of personal revelation, is that when you open that door up, if you say there is no revelation period, that's a pretty good barrier you've solved that problem. But if you open that door and say, yes God speaks to the mind and heart of His children and that He can give personal revelation on very important matters. And as our Article of Faith teaches that He has revealed and does reveal and He will yet reveal many important things. Then you open up a hazard that some false or counterfeit revelations come. I like what Brigham Young said, is that there are three kinds of revelations. There are revelations of God, there are revelations of the devil, we certainly see those satanic or evil counterfeits around us, and then he said there are revelations of man. And that would be sometimes people who want something so badly that they then create or manufacture their own revelation in quotation marks or there is something that is so persuasive, an argument in the world that isn't necessarily Satan doing it, but just men among themselves creating these misconceptions.

ROBERT MILLET: President Packer's warning that if we try to force the spirit of revelation we will open the way to be misled.

BRENT TOP: And that's why our friend and colleague Joseph Field McConkie wrote something I thought so wonderful years ago and something that only Joseph could get away with saying is that he called them the "goose pimple gang". That tends to be deceived when everything has to bring goose pimples or raise the hair on the back of your neck.

ROBERT MILLET: It has to be an emotional experience.

BRENT TOP: It has to be some sensational, supernatural experience and so as a result of that people miss true revelation and can be easily deceived by those false revelations, whether they be of man or of the devil.

ROBERT MILLET: Well let's put forward some questions that we might ask, in ascertaining whether supposed divine direction or revelation is from God or man or from the devil. Let me ask the first question Brent, maybe one thing we can determine is this, is the revelation within the person's area of responsibility, is it within their care, their concern? You want to comment on that?

BRENT TOP: Absolutely. That was one of the fundamental principles of the gospel that the Lord will speak from the top down not from the bottom up. And we see great examples in the early history of the Church and the issue being then resolved or settled in my mind by revelation. Doctrine & Covenants section 28 tells us that Hyrum Paige a no back bench, back sliding jack Mormon, he was one of the eight witnesses of the Book of Mormon so he certainly had prominence in his own right, was receiving revelations in his mind of where the gathering place was going to be for the New Jerusalem and that was of great topic of interest to the Saints. And he even persuaded Oliver Cowdery that he was receiving the revelation. When Joseph hears about this he doesn't do what I as a natural man would have done. I would have gone to Oliver and Hyrum Paige and said, "You did what? You said what? You don't receive revelation." But Joseph being a man of God goes to the Lord says, "This is what's being said, what do I do with this?" And the Lord revealed to Joseph and to Oliver particularly that they Lord will speak through His prophet. And that those matters that have that general application and that established the doctrines and general procedures of the Church are not going to come to people that do not have that stewardship, the responsibility or those keys.

ROBERT MILLET: You can see just how chaotic things would become, not just on a general level, but if every person claimed to be receiving revelation for every other person.

BRENT TOP: Exactly

ROBERT MILLET: Someone comes to me and says as a woman did once, "I received some revelations for you." Well, it might be very lovely what she has to say, but I have to ask questions like, "Who are you? What right would you have to receive revelation for me? Are you my mother, are my home teacher, are you my quorum leader, are you my bishop, are you my stake president?" If in fact this person is not, they're not entitled to that kind of direction.

BRENT TOP: Well, and again it goes back to that principle of supernatural or thinking it has to be some sensational thing. There are people, in section 43 is a great example of that, of Mrs. Hubble. And it says in the history of the Church that she is very sanctimonious and people would think, oh she is a very spiritual person. And that that would mean that she

would be guided and directed by the Spirit. And yet she was receiving revelations for Joseph and this was less than a year after section 28 had been given, when I thought this issue had been settled. And yet again members of the Church were thinking she is so spiritual we have got to listen to it. And then the Lord says, “No one but the president of the Church or the head has the right to receive revelation for the whole.”

ROBERT MILLET: Here's the statement that I love from the Prophet Joseph Smith. He said, "I will inform you that it is contrary to the economy of God for any member of the Church or anyone to receive instruction for those in authority higher than themselves. That's a great principle. He goes on to say later, that's from the *Teachings of the Prophet*, page 111, excuse me, page 21. Here on page 111 is what the prophet said, "Revelations of the mind and will of God to the Church are to come through the presidency."

BRENT TOP: And you know I think there is, even at the statement of saying that we can receive personal revelation within our own stewardship that is the basic perimeter, the foundational fence around the principle of revelation is that the Lord is going to speak to His prophets, seers and revelators who hold the keys of revelation for the Church.

ROBERT MILLET: Well said, we will be right back.

[PAUSE]

ROBERT MILLET: Welcome back to Mormon Identity, this is Bob Millet and I'm joined by Professor Brent Top of the Religion faculty at Brigham Young University. We're talking about using discernment, in regard to revelation and trying to discern and determine when something is from God. And the principle we talked about was this idea, is it within the individual claiming the revelation, is it in their area of responsibility? Brent your final thought on that?

BRENT TOP: I just had a thought, one of things I share with my students at BYU is that even within those perimeters of stewardship or responsibility there are still some safe guards that the Lord would expect us to impose on personal revelation. For example if I was a bishop and I had the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of my ward members, I probably wouldn't receive a revelation saying, it's now time for you to have another baby. I don't think, even though I have a responsibility over them, I don't think I have that right or that stewardship. Or if my home teacher came to me and said I received a revelation your wife now needs to get a job in this economy. Those kinds of things, even though we have stewardships and responsibilities we receive revelation and how to council and how to teach the principles of the gospel. But those matters that are very deeply personal within the framework of the gospel principles are left to individuals to make those decisions.

ROBERT MILLET: Well said. A second question we might ask, is the teaching, the supposed revelation in harmony with the standard works, with the laws of the land, is it in harmony with teachings of the Church, and the Church's leaders? What do you think of that Brent?

BRENT TOP: Well one thing I love is the word “cannon” itself, the cannon in the ancient Greek and later Latin, means a measuring rod, or like a yard stick.

ROBERT MILLET: A rule

BRENT TOP: The rule by which you are measuring things.

ROBERT MILLET: Kind of like the rule of faith and practice.

BRENT TOP: Yeah so, I think a lot of times we forget as Latter-day Saints when we speak of the standard works, we're not talking about just because there standardized and printed all the same and you can buy them at Church distribution. It is standard meaning that is the standard by which we measure and judge truth and in this particular case, how we judge revelation. The old fashioned scales, now everything's gone digital, but the old fashioned scales of justice that you can see, you have on one, you have these two baskets that balance and on one side would be the standard, and so we in measuring our revelation have to measure it against, to balance it against the standard works, which are the scriptures and the words of the prophets.

ROBERT MILLET: You know I am reminded and you may have had the same experience Brett. But some of us older ones certainly did. When we served a mission we went to Salt Lake City to go to the mission home, as it was called then. One of the privileges we had was to go in the Salt Lake Temple and Elder Harold B. Lee was with us to answer questions. Did you have that opportunity?

BRENT TOP: I did, I'm not as old as you by a long shot.

ROBERT MILLET: He was much younger when I met with him.

BRENT TOP: Well Brigham Young signed your call.

ROBERT MILLET: [LAUGHING] Let me say that the thing that impressed me the most wasn't just that he gave marvelous answers. But in each case when a question was asked of Brother Lee, he always would say, "Let's see what the Lord said." And he would turn to the scriptures, often the Doctrine and Covenants. But he would say, "Let's see what the Lord says." I remember on another occasion Brother Lee was asked a series of questions, what's the Church's stand on, has the Church taken a stand on, has the Church taken a stand on? And he finally said, "Brethren, I don't know if the Church has taken a stand on that, but the Lord has." And then he read to us from the standard works. And it was really something to this. Knowing the scriptures well enough, to know not just the doctrines which I think is a critical in foundation, but to know the principles that then radiate from those doctrines.

BRENT TOP: And I think that is also part of that discernment is I don't always have to pray for some peaceful warm burning in my bosom feeling on some matters because it is so crystal clear in the scriptures what the Lord has said and what He would want me to do.

ROBERT MILLET: You know it's not uncommon when I'm teaching this to students at Brigham Young University for a young freshman usually to raise a hand and say, "Well Brother Millet what about Abraham offering Isaac in sacrifice? Or Nephi slaying Laban? Now those appear to be out of the realm of the ordinary and killing someone is certainly not keeping with God's plan" And I've often said to them, "You know our job really is to abide by the rules the Lord has given." The rule here is thou shalt not kill. And we would do well to abide by the rules and in this case leave the exceptions to the prophets. Does that make

sense?

BRENT TOP: Oh yeah, and I think what you're getting to there is not only will revelation be within the boundaries of what the Lord has revealed in the standard works and to His prophets, seers and revelators. But it is also going to be within the realm of legality that the Lord is not going to speak up and say, "You are to go over and steal your neighbors car and consecrate it to the Lord." It just doesn't work that way. The Lord is not going to do that. The Lord's house is a house of order, and I think we would use the word "law" as well.

ROBERT MILLET: A third question I suppose we could ask. Let me tell a story Brent to, in order to introduce this question. I am reminded of a story that Harold B. Lee used to tell. When he was a stake president he tells of a very difficult disciplinary council that he was required to hold on a man who had been found guilty of a very serious moral infraction. The man was excommunicated from the Church. And soon thereafter his brother came in to see Brother Lee and he said, "I want to tell you you've made a terrible mistake." Brother Lee said, "What do you mean?" "My brother is innocent. I know he's innocent." And Brother Lee says, "How do you know he's innocent?" He said, "Because I prayed about it and the Lord told me that he's innocent." And Brother Lee said, "Well that's interesting. Last night fifteen of the finest men I know who are striving to keep the commandments met and they prayed and they got a different answer." Let's pause. We'll be right back.

[PAUSE]

ROBERT MILLET: We welcome you back to Mormon Identity, this is Bob Millet. I'm joined with this program with my friend Brent Top. Brent is member of the Church History and Doctrine faculty at Brigham Young University. We are discussing what it means to use discretion, discernment, wisdom in determining when supposed revelation is from God. We are talking right now, and I begun telling a story that Harold B. Lee told about a man who was excommunicated, his brother came in and said to Brother Lee, "You made a terrible mistake, I prayed about it and got a different answer." Brother Lee then said that he had met last night with some fine men who prayed about it. Brother Lee turned to the man at this point and said, "May I ask you some questions?" The man said, "Certainly." Brother Lee said, "How old are you?" He said he was about 45. He said, "Are you a member of the Church?" "I am." He said, "What priesthood do you hold?" The man said he thought he was a teacher. "Do you live the word of wisdom?" Brother Lee said it was obvious he did not. "Do you attend church?" "I don't," he said, "And I won't as long as that blankety blank so in so is Bishop." "Well do you observe the law of tithing; do you pay your tithing?" "No, I don't, and I won't as long as he's the bishop." He went from a string of questions and each one the man said no, and Brother Lee said, you know, "Those men last night that met with us are men that have kept all of these commandments. And you by your own admonition have kept none of them, claim that you have received a revelation, a revelation that is different from what we received. How do you explain that?" And the man said something that was pretty profound he said, "Well," he bowed his head and said, "I suppose I got my answer from the wrong source." And then Elder Lee said this, and I think this is pretty profound too, he said, "And so it is, we receive our answers from the source we choose to obey." Brent, what about the history of the Church we seemed to have had a similar situation.

BRENT TOP:

It seems like that was a pattern of history throughout the early days of the Church. That it was so wonderful to be able to have revelation and that the heavens were not sealed and that the spiritual gifts abounded on the earth, and yet there were those that were deceived. And there was always a problem with many of the early Saints. And so the Lord was always addressing that issue. In Doctrine and Covenants section 52, I love what the Lord says here, He uses the word “pattern”. He says "I will give unto you a pattern in all things, that ye may not be deceived." When I grew up in South Eastern Idaho my father owned a fabric store, now there not many fabric stores now, but they are primarily for curtains and crafts and things like that. But it was very popular to sew your own clothes. And I knew a lot about patterns, because they would sell Butterick, McCall, Simplicity, I know this stuff. I think it's a wonderful word, because when you would make clothes you would have an actual template that you would put over the fabric to cut out so that everything would fit together. And I like that the Lord says here, I am giving you pattern so that you won't be deceived. And one of the ways that we take that pattern is to use it as a template, and if something doesn't fit then it cannot be of God. And this is what the Lord then goes on to say, this is the reason why He is giving the pattern, He says, “For Satan is abroad in the land, and he goeth forth deceiving the nations. Wherefore he that prayth, whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me.” Or we can change the words for our purposes today, and say he that receives revelation or true guidance and direction from the Lord is accepted of me and those revelations are authentic and then here comes this key phrase, “if he obey my ordinances.” And then again in the very next verse, in verse 16 says once again, says, “The same is of God if he obey my ordinances.” And then come down to verse 18, and He says the person that is deceived “bringeth not forth fruits, even according to this pattern.” And the pattern is given to us to know. And so obeying the commandments, living a life of righteousness and worthiness that's that pattern and that template, and if that's out of kilter, if that's wrong it's not going to fit.

ROBERT MILLET: This would be particularly relevant and helpful to priesthood leaders, in other words, a person coming in and claiming a major revelation let's say if the priesthood leader knows for example if this person is not simply in good standing with the Church you don't even have to evaluate the revelation, you will know that it is not of God.

BRENT TOP: Let me give you a quick example of that, when I was in a leadership position at one time, and consulting with the bishop, a bishop was telling me that there was a young man in his ward, a young adult that had been dating a girl for many, many months and then they had been involved in immorality. And he was trying to teach this young man, that there was discipline involved. And the bishop said, “Why don't you just get married civilly, put things behind you, let's fully repent and then you can go to the temple a year later.” And the young man incredulously said to the bishop, “Well, I've been praying about her, but I just haven't received an answer.” And it just kind of dawned on the bishop and on me that he didn't get that his immorality was directly related to his lack of receiving revelation.

ROBERT MILLET: You know, I may not be in a position to judge Bill Brown or John Johnson or Henrietta Lancaster whether their worthy, but a priesthood leader can. And maybe more importantly I can determine whether I'm worthy, if my life is out of line. I probably shouldn't expect the things that come to me in the form of revelations, especially things that would be rather controversial, to be from God.

BRENT TOP: It is not according to the pattern as the Lord said.

ROBERT MILLET: Well that's a good principle. Let me ask this next question and then we will pause and take a break. The next question I'd ask is, is the supposed revelation is it rational? Is it dignified? Is it in keeping with the standards that an oracle from God ought to have? We'll pause there.

[PAUSE]

ROBERT MILLET: Welcome back to Mormon Identity. I'm Bob Millet and I'm joined by Brent Top. Brent, we just began to talk about this question that we might raised in regard to supposed revelation, is it rational, is it dignified, is it as Joseph Smith would have said, is it decorous, is there a decorum about it? Do you want to comment on that?

BRENT TOP: Well you mentioned a couple of things that I see as two separate but related issues. One, is it rational? Remember in Doctrine in Covenants section 8 the Lord said, "I will tell you in your mind." And then also in section 9 He says to Oliver Cowdery, "Study it out in your mind." And that is not just going to come in a vacuum and so revelation is going to make sense to a large degree.

ROBERT MILLET: It may not be something that I have chosen to do, or something I want to do, but it will be rational.

BRENT TOP: That's right and so that is the one issue. Then you used the word "dignified" or "decorous" that again is one of the issues in early Church history that came up several times where the Lord had to address the problem. And that would be with many of the new converts. They brought some of their spiritualism into their experience and Parley P. Pratt particularly speaks of people receiving revelations and doing things that were totally undignified, irreverent and would be all kinds of improper contortions

ROBERT MILLET: Barking like a dog.

BRENT TOP: Yes, and thinking it was some gift of the Spirit and so in Doctrine and Covenants section 50 the Lord addresses that issue. Particularly because He says in verse 2 that there are false spirits that are going forth deceiving the world, and the Lord reminds us, "Satan hath sought to deceive you." And so He gives us the principle again that it is going to come through proper authority. But also, I really like that He said that, "That which doth not edify is not of God." Edifying is not just feeling good, it is going to make me better, it is dignified.

ROBERT MILLET: It will build you up.

BRENT TOP: It will build you up is a better way of saying it.

ROBERT MILLET: Edifice.

BRENT TOP: And so I think, and He said, "That you may know the truth, that you may chase darkness from you."

ROBERT MILLET: I am reminded of an experience I had as a young seminary teacher more than thirty years

ago. I had taught a lesson on the importance of striving to keep the Holy Ghost with us; the importance of seeking for divine direction and personal revelation. The next day a young lady in the class, a lovely young woman, very fine, as far as I can tell, worthy, active, strong young lady came up after class and said she wanted to share something with me. And I said, "What's that?" She said, "Well I had this marvelous experience last night." And I said, "What happened?" She said, "Well my mom and dad and my brothers and sisters decided they wanted to go for a ride, but I just wanted to stay home and maybe watch some TV. I was sitting in front of the television," she said, "in a large chair, and of all of sudden the Spirit said, 'Get up and turn the TV off.'" And she said, "And I did. And it said, 'Run into the bedroom,' and I did. And the Spirit said, 'Get under the bed,' and I did. The Spirit said, 'Get out from under the bed,' and I did. And the Spirit said, 'Run into the backyard, hurry.'" And she said, "I did. And it said, 'Run around the yard three times.'" And she did. It said, "Hide behind the wood pile." And she did. She said, "It said, 'Run back into the house.' And I did. It said, 'Sit in the chair.'" And she said, "I did. It said, 'Turn the television back on.' I did." She looked at me with tears in her eyes and she said, "Isn't it wonderful Brother Millet how the Lord can guide us." And I remember thinking "Well I suppose the Lord may have had some purpose for all of that. It seemed a little irrational and undignified." You know what I'm saying. Probably what was happening was that she was responding to every thought that came into her head. Anything else we want to say about that, it ought to be dignified, it ought to be decorous, it ought to be something that speaks of the dignity of Jesus Christ.

BRENT TOP: And again the Lord in section 50 also again reminds us that things are going to come through the head, meaning the president of the Church. And I love also the principle there that things are not with rallying accusation or boasting, this principle of it just being over the top the term we would use, the things over the top.

ROBERT MILLET: It's just too much.

BRENT TOP: The Lord usually doesn't work that way. Now there have been times in the history of the Church when there were Pentecostal-type days, but those were really rare and really established a foundation rather being the norm.

ROBERT MILLET: But they also caused burning in the bosom. They caused peacefulness. It was clear to the Saints that were experiencing those things this was God, because of the way it made them feel. And the light and enlightenment that came to them as a result of it.

BRENT TOP: And I think that is one of the reasons why we receive council with regards to the music, the Church music that we sing and participate in is because sometimes things may be very, very emotional and may even have a great message of praise, but are not dignified or referential and actually may grieve the Spirit.

ROBERT MILLET: I think that's good. Maybe a final question, does the supposed revelation does it build ones faith in Jesus Christ? Does it build one's faith in the Church? Does it build one's faith in the kingdom of God and in it's constituted authorities? You know this is a significant one. This is one that is really important in the sense that when all is said and done, as you said earlier, the Lord's house is a house of order; He will not compete against Himself. There is no way that God is going to reveal to Bill one thing, to Ted

another and to the president of the Church something else entirely. It is a house of order in which we work, and the Lord has a way of trying to maintain that order through establishing guidelines and checks that we ought to be able to assess for ourselves what is from God and what is not. Now we end where we began and that is one of the great and sweet privileges of membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that we are entitled to divine direction. In the immortal words of Moses to Joshua, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets and He would put His spirit upon them."

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You've been listening to Mormon Identity thanks for tuning in. We hope you join us next time.

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