

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

LIGHT, TRUTH, AND GRACE: THREE THEMES OF SALVATION (D&C 93)

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The revelation contained in section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants was received May 6, 1833. The specific circumstances that generated it are obscure; the general conditions, however, are clear. During the few months before Joseph Smith received this informative masterpiece, the energy of the leaders of the Church was focused on making Kirtland, Ohio, a major stake of Zion. Since March 1833, efforts had been made to buy several farms for Church use.¹ These efforts had met with success, and some of the Saints had begun to settle on various pieces of land. During that same period Sidney Rigdon and Frederick G. Williams were ordained to the office of Presidents of the high priesthood, were given the keys of the kingdom, and became Joseph Smith's counselors.² President Williams was assigned to rent one of the pieces of property and to care for it for the benefit of the Church.³

At a meeting on May 4, these men presided. The meeting focused on how best to raise funds for a meetinghouse for the School of the Prophets.⁴ Rented halls and homes had been used up to this point, but the Lord had instructed the Prophet that the time was right for the school to have its own house in which important instruction on both temporal and spiritual matters could be given. He emphasized

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individual worthiness to assure the success of the endeavor. Just two months before, the Lord had warned:

“Be admonished in all your high-mindedness and pride, for it bringeth a snare upon your souls.

“Set in order your houses; keep slothfulness and uncleanness far from you. . . .

“Search diligently, pray always, and be believing, and all things shall work together for your good, if ye walk uprightly and remember the covenant wherewith ye have covenanted one with another” (D&C 90:17–18, 24).

In this revelation we see concern expressed over pride and slothfulness, and admonitions given for the Saints to pray, to be believing, and to set their homes in order. The latter was needed even at the highest levels of Church leadership. Because this admonition was not followed immediately, circumstances arose that the revelation recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 93 addressed.

During the settling period, rather serious family problems had beset President Williams. Just what these were is unknown, but apparently he had discussed them with the Prophet. The revelation given on May 6, 1833, now recorded in section 93, identified the source of the troubles that were besetting President Williams: “You have not taught your children light and truth, according to the commandments; and that wicked one hath power, as yet, over you, and this is the cause of your affliction” (D&C 93:42). The revelation then instructed all the members of the First Presidency as well as the bishop of Kirtland, Newel K. Whitney, to set their houses in order. The revelation explained the value and necessity of doing so and in the process provided deeper understanding of certain aspects of salvation, among them light, truth, and grace. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the contribution this revelation makes to our understanding of the relationship of these concepts in the work of salvation.

“THE GLORY OF GOD IS INTELLIGENCE”

The Lord commanded President Williams to bring up his children in “light and truth” (D&C 93:42), having already elaborated on the importance of these two elements. In His elaboration the Lord explained, “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light

and truth" (D&C 93:36). Observe that light and truth are shown to be constituent elements of intelligence, which constitutes the glory of God.

The concept of glory is very prominent in the scriptures, especially as something bestowed on the faithful as part of their final reward. But what is glory? A modern dictionary gives as definitions "fame, honor, distinction, and renown."⁵ Over the centuries many Christian theologians, such as Milton, Johnson, and Thomas Aquinas, have felt that this was the sense of the scriptural use. Specifically, *glory* denoted appreciation or approval from God.⁶ Thus, the glory of God was the favor and respect He granted those who met with His divine approbation.

The definition given in section 93 goes beyond such a definition, at least so far as the glory associated with God is concerned. His glory, as defined under inspiration, is something associated with His very nature, not just something He bestows upon others. Moses not only saw but also shared in the glory of God. The account in Moses 1:2 states, "And he saw God face to face, and he talked with him, and the glory of God was upon Moses; therefore Moses could endure his presence." There is no doubt that Moses was in the favor of God, but this revelation shows that God's glory was a capacitating agent that made it possible for Moses to bear God's actual presence. But that was not all. Through that power Moses was endowed with sufficient intellect to understand to a degree the nature of God's work. The Lord stated that He would show Moses the workmanship of His hands, "but not all, for my works are without end, and also my words, for they never cease." He then explained why He would not show Moses all His works: "No man can behold all my works," He said, "except he behold all my glory; and no man can behold all my glory, and afterwards remain in the flesh on the earth" (Moses 1:4–5). This scripture suggests that it is God's glory that gives him the capacity to be all-seeing. Further, the ability to behold all that glory would require a change in the basic constitution of man that would make him more than mortal.

LIGHT AS AN ASPECT OF GLORY

A modern dictionary gives a secondary definition of *glory* as "a ring or spot of light";⁷ glory is therefore associated with radiance. The

dictionary gives one the feeling that such association is very limited; that, however, is not the case in a dictionary available to Joseph Smith. According to that dictionary, *glory* is first and foremost “brightness, luster, and splendor.” Only in a secondary sense is it fame or praise. That dictionary notes that in a scriptural sense, glory is a manifestation of the presence of God.⁸This meaning accords much better with Joseph Smith’s use of the term. For example, while recounting his First Vision he wrote, “I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. . . . I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description” (Joseph Smith—History 1:16–17). Writing of this experience on another occasion, he stated, “I was enwrapped in heavenly vision, and saw two glorious personages, who exactly resembled each other in features and likeness, surrounded with a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noon day.”⁹In these passages, glory is directly associated with radiance. This association fits nicely with the idea expressed in Doctrine and Covenants 93 that light is a constituent part of glory.

To ancient Israel, one of the important aspects of God was His ability to display His power through the manifestation of burning light. Indeed, Israel stood in awe of the display of a brilliance like a devouring inferno on the top of Sinai (see Exodus 24:17). Moses proclaimed, “The Lord thy God is a consuming fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24). His presence was made manifest on more than one occasion by a pillar of fire, which gave light to Israel but vexed the Egyptians (see Exodus 13:21; 14:24). The cloud of His glory dwelt upon the tabernacle, while its radiance filled the court (see Exodus 40:34). The fact that this idea has continued into the present can be seen in the promise to the early Saints that “this generation shall not all pass away until an house shall be built unto the Lord, and a cloud shall rest upon it, which cloud shall be even the glory of the Lord, which shall fill the house” (D&C 84:5).

Like Moses, the Prophet Joseph Smith knew well the glory associated with the presence of the Lord. Of His appearance in the Kirtland Temple, the Prophet reported, “His eyes were as a flame of fire; . . . his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun” (D&C 110:3). We are told that when He comes the second time He will be “clothed in the brightness of his glory” (D&C 65:5). These are only

a few of many references suggesting that light and radiance are important aspects of glory.

LIGHT AND THE PROCESS OF SALVATION

Radiance in the normative sense is related to light. But what is light? A careful look at the way the term is used in the scriptures suggests that it is more than mere luminosity. We get a glimpse of the breadth of meaning ascribed to the word when the Lord states, "The light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings" (D&C 88:11). This phrase defines *light* not only as something that makes vision possible but also as that force which activates and stimulates the intellect. Further, light "is in all things," gives "life to all things," and "is the law by which all things are governed" (D&C 88:13). Thus, a more full definition would make light an ever-present, life- and law-giving power that manifests itself, among other ways, as natural light, intellectual activity, and the living energy in all things. The scriptures declare that this "light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space" and that it is "the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things" (D&C 88:12–13).

These scriptures suggest that the term *light* is used to describe that aspect of the nature of God which radiates out from Him, expanding with His work and will, enlightening, organizing, capacitating, and quickening as it does.

In sum, light is the ever-present, life- and law-giving, intellectually and spiritually quickening aspect of the power of God. Perhaps the best definition would be living and capacitating energy. Thus, a scripture states, "That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day" (D&C 50:24). This scripture suggests that the continual reception of this living energy endows one with ability. Thus, the Lord states, "If your eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you; and that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things" (D&C 88:67). As we increase in

light, we increase in ability until we are able to comprehend all things.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIGHT AND TRUTH

One is not glorified in light, or as here defined, power or energy. Glorification is contingent upon the reception of the other all-important element. Section 93 teaches us, “He that keepeth [God’s] commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified *in truth* and knoweth all things” (D&C 93:28; emphasis added). The glorifying principle is truth. Defining truth,¹⁰ the scripture states, “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24). In other words, truth is knowledge of what a Latter-day Saint hymn proclaims as “the sum of existence.”¹¹ Truth defined in this way is always associated with light because truth can only be acquired through the power or the capacitating force of light. Without the faculty created by light, a fulness of truth could never be gained.

The acquisition of both light and truth is dependent on obedience. Explaining the need and the reason for obedience, the Lord stated, “You shall live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God” (D&C 84:44). The explanation is simple: obedience is requisite for eternal life. Again the Lord explains why: “For the word of the Lord is truth, and whatsoever is truth is light, and whatsoever is light is Spirit, even the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (D&C 84:45). The factors of life—light and truth—are equated with the Spirit of Christ, because He alone controls their dissemination through the bestowal of His Spirit. Therefore, He can stipulate the means by which they are granted. Thus, obedience to His will is absolutely requisite for those who would gain life.

According to Doctrine and Covenants 131:7–8, all spirit is matter. If this includes the Spirit of Christ, then its bestowal upon an individual would be an imparting of actual celestial substance—actual elements producing higher power, higher capacity, higher life. The result of its infusion would be spiritual and intellectual capacitation, which would allow the individual to progress to the point that He could enjoy eternal life.

But the capacitating force of light would have to precede the possession of this celestial substance. The scripture continues, “And the

Spirit giveth light to every man that cometh into the world; and the Spirit enlighteneth every man through the world, that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit. And every one that hearkeneth to the voice of the Spirit cometh unto God, even the Father" (D&C 84:46–47). Light, the capacitating power, and enlightenment, or truth, are received by acquisition of celestial element through the Spirit of Christ to those who obey the word. But first comes obedience to the word, then light, and finally truth.

Thus, all things—word, light, truth, Spirit—become one. They are inseparably welded together so man cannot be touched by one without being touched by all. Accordingly, the scripture states, "My voice is Spirit; my Spirit is truth; truth abideth and hath no end; and if it be in you it shall abound" (D&C 88:66). As noted already, that body which is filled with light—the power of God—can comprehend all things: truth.

For emphasis, let me say again that truth is the basis of glorification. Section 93 helps us understand why. In verse 30 we read, "All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence." The very essence of existence is the ability of truth and intelligence to act for themselves. But how can truth, which has been defined earlier as knowledge, act? It would be more comprehensible if the scripture stated that truth impels or causes righteous action. But that is not what this verse states. And what does the scripture mean by "all truth"? Is there more than one kind of truth?

Understanding comes from the latter part of verse 30, which states that "all intelligence" is free to act for itself. As noted above, intelligence is equated with the glory of God—in other words, light and truth. But intelligence is also equated with a specific primal substance. Verse 29 of section 93 states, "Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be."¹² Thus, intelligence has two scriptural definitions. One is an abstraction designated as "light and truth," conveying the idea of mental acuity by which existence is cognized. The other is more concrete. It designates the primal substance of being, which is called "the light of truth." The context of verse 30 suggests that intelligence should be understood in the latter sense. Thus, all intelligence, or the primal sub-

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stance from which man is created, is free to act within the bounds in which God has placed it.

Intelligence, then, has two definitions. So may *truth*. The Lord says *all truth* is independent in the sphere in which He has placed it. If truth is the knowledge of the sum of existence, then *all truth* would seem to define existence itself.¹³ Thus, all existence (or all things that exist—that is, truth) has a measure of independence in which it is free to act. Of this totality, that portion designated as intelligence and associated expressly with man is also free to act. Because it is a portion of the whole of reality, it is designated as the spirit part of truth.

In sum, “all intelligence,” as I see it, identifies a component of the spirit aspect of existence. The phrase *all truth* defines the whole of that existence. The condition for glorification is cognition of that whole. Cognition comes only with obedience and the acquisition of light, which allows truth to follow as the capstone and seal. Thus, one is glorified in truth.

Note that God is the one who sets the bounds and conditions that make cognition possible. He has determined that man will be glorified only as he receives truth. But man can receive a fulness of truth only as he receives a fulness of light. Emphasizing this point are the verses that state: “Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning [truth] is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light [or capacitating power]. And every man whose spirit receiveth not the light is under condemnation” (D&C 93:31–32). Intelligence is free to choose or reject light. When it willfully rejects light, it is rejecting truth, and condemnation follows.

WHY MAN CAN RECEIVE LIGHT AND TRUTH

Section 93 explains why man is capable of receiving a fulness of light and truth. The Savior states, “I was in the beginning with the Father” (D&C 93:21); “I am the Spirit of truth, and John bore record of me, saying: He received a fulness of truth, yea, even of all truth” (D&C 93:26). Because Christ is of God (I take this to mean that He was the literal Son of God and so was of the genus of the Gods), He had the ability to do what the race of the Gods do, and that includes possessing all truth. One purpose of John’s record, as preserved in

section 93, was to bear testimony that this potential was indeed realized in the Lord.

But the Savior was not the only descendant of the Gods. He tells us that He was but the firstborn of many brethren (see Romans 8:29). Therefore, concerning mankind, He further explains, “Ye were also in the beginning with the Father; that which is Spirit, even the Spirit of truth” (D&C 93:23). Here we learn that as Christ was in the beginning with the Father, so too was man. Further, both man and Christ are the Spirit of truth. They are therefore of the same genus, their primal nature being identical. Accordingly, what the Savior was able to realize is likewise within the potential of man. This is emphasized in the verses that state, “Verily I say unto you, I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn; and all those who are begotten through me are the partakers of the glory of the same, and are the church of the Firstborn” (D&C 93:21–22). We can receive glory, even the same glory as the Savior, because we are of the same origin and stock.

CHRIST AS THE SOURCE OF LIGHT AND TRUTH

But what is the process by which mortals receive the glory of Christ? The Savior has answered, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Here He emphasizes that the only way is through Him, and He explains the reason, stating that He will appoint nothing unto man “except it be by law, even as I and my Father ordained unto you, before the world was.” Going on, He states, “I am the Lord thy God; and I give unto you this commandment—that no man shall come unto the Father but by me or by my word, which is my law, saith the Lord” (D&C 132:11–12).

Here we see the central role that the word of Christ plays in the process of salvation. Man can only come to know God through the word of the Lord. But we have already seen that His word is equated with spirit, light, and truth. Therefore, the reception of the word is the reception of light and truth. The Savior’s objective is to bring obedient souls to a fulness of glory. He knows how, for He followed the way set down by the Father. And if man receives glory, it will be in the same way through which Christ received it.

God’s glory consists of a fulness of light and truth. Christ was glo-

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rified as He too came to possess a fulness of light and truth. It did not happen all at once. Section 93 states, "I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; and he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness" (D&C 93:12–13).

THE ROLE OF GRACE

The role played by grace in the process through which the Lord received a fulness of the glory of the Father was twofold: He received grace for grace, and He went from grace to grace. But what does it mean to receive grace for grace and to go from grace to grace? The answer lies in the very nature of grace. The word denotes favor, kindness, and goodwill. Out of this comes the theological definition: "the free unmerited love and favor of God," which brings divine assistance to His chosen ones.¹⁴ The key expressions here are love, favor, and unmerited assistance. To receive grace for grace is to receive assistance on the condition of giving assistance. But not just any kind of assistance can be given. What transforms assistance into grace is the kindness and favor felt by the giver and extended to the receiver when such service is totally unmerited. But grace does not have to be given without condition. Indeed, an important aspect of the word is reciprocity. The scripture states specifically that man receives "grace for grace" (D&C 93:20). Thus, the extension of favor is meant to obligate the recipient so that he will extend the same. As he meets this condition, more grace is extended to him, which further obligates him to greater assistance of others.

Apparently, it was necessary for the Lord to grow through this process. In order to do so, He first received grace, or divine assistance, from the Father. This grace He extended to His brethren. As He did so, He received even more grace. The process continued until He eventually received a fulness of the glory of the Father. The implication of this process is interesting: in a very real way, Christ Himself was saved by grace.

Such a concept sheds light on certain aspects of the Savior's teachings. "The Father hath not left me alone," He stated, "for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). Here He acknowledged the contingent relationship that existed between Him and His Father. He was totally dependent upon the Father for power and knowledge. By

doing God's will, the Savior enjoyed communion with the Father, through which God gave grace to the Son. This association anchored the Savior's profound abilities to teach and to do. He insisted, "The Son can do nothing of himself," but "the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works" (John 5:19; 14:10). Thus, the grace of God was, of necessity, upon the Son. But note that it was truly grace, for the Atonement did not effect the Father's salvation. Otherwise, any assistance God rendered could not be considered an act of grace but of necessity.

In a very real way, the Savior has the same relation to the Father as we have to Christ. He stated, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:4-5).

These verses suggest another important aspect of grace, that of impartation. Whenever grace is extended, something is imparted. This imparting results in increased ability in the recipient. In the scriptures the reception of grace is expressed in two ways: a loss of the very propensity for sin and the accompanying ability to live God's laws. Paul taught this concept, saying, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? . . . For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:1-2, 14).

The Savior Himself had to have power to live His Father's law. According to Joseph Smith, "None ever were perfect but Jesus; and why was He perfect? Because He was the Son of God, and had the fullness of the Spirit, and greater power than any man."¹⁵This power came through grace, even the grace of God.

Just what was imparted to Christ and, by inference, to man? Doctrine and Covenants 93 makes clear that it is light and truth. The possession of light and truth allows one to forsake the evil one and to be protected against his machinations. Further, light and truth enable their recipient to progress toward a fulness of the glory of God. This was the case with the Lord. Through His benevolence, He received grace. Additional powers of light and truth were continually being extended to Him such that He went from grace to grace. In other

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words, He went from one power level to another, from one capacity to a greater, until He received a fulness of the Father.

Receiving these life-giving principles of God allowed the Lord to become the spiritual Son of the Father.¹⁶ John seems to have been communicating this idea when he stated, “And *thus* he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at the first” (D&C 93:14; emphasis added). The Father confirmed that sonship had been accomplished when He stated, “This is my beloved Son” (D&C 93:15). The fulness of sonship was contingent upon receiving the fulness of grace or, in other words, light and truth. The Savior did receive this fulness, and John testified, “He received a fulness of the glory of the Father; and he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him” (D&C 93:16–17).

Thus, section 93 is clear about the way the Savior gained the glory of the Father. Since He is the way, the course He pursued must be the way all must follow. Section 93 is emphatic that this is the case. The Savior states, “I give unto you these sayings that you may understand, . . . that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness. For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace” (D&C 93:19–20).

Expressing the same thought, the Prophet Joseph Smith stated, “You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.”¹⁷

CONCLUSION

An essential part of the glory of God is light, or living, life-giving energy. Light is a capacitating power through which man is given the faculty to receive truth. Possession of truth is the condition that must be met for glorification. A fulness of truth, or the knowledge of the sum of existence, requires the acquisition of the fulness of light. The

grace of God plays a direct part in the reception of light and truth. Grace expresses itself through impartation. That which is imparted is light. The agency of man is expressed in choosing or rejecting light. But he is not free to choose or reject grace. Grace comes to all men freely, as it is the unmerited favor that God holds for all His children. Grace allows light to flow unto man. Thus, light, through grace, is freely manifest unto man. When we reject light, we reject God's favor and cut ourselves off from truth. Thus, we stand under condemnation. When we accept grace by choosing light, we are capacitated to receive truth. As we continue from grace to grace by giving grace for grace, we receive more light and truth until we are eventually glorified in truth.

NOTES

1. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–51), 1:335.
2. Smith, *History of the Church*, 334.
3. Smith, *History of the Church*, 336.
4. Smith, *History of the Church*, 342–43.
5. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. "glory."
6. C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1949), 8–9.
7. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. "glory."
8. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 3rd ed. of the reprint of the 1829 ed. (San Francisco: Foundation of American Christian Education, 1983), s.v. "glory."
9. Smith, *History of the Church*, 4:536.
10. *American Dictionary*, in standard use during Joseph Smith's lifetime, defines *truth* as "conformity to fact or reality; exact accordance with that which is, or has been, or shall be" (s.v. "truth").
11. John Jaques, "Oh Say, What Is Truth?" *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 272.
12. The Prophet Joseph Smith elaborated on this thought, stating, "Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle. It is a spirit from age to age, and there is no creation about it" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939], 354). B. H. Roberts believed this referred to the primal substance from which man's spirit was organized (see Smith, *Teachings*, 354 n. 9; see also 158 n. 5).
13. This is the definition in "Oh Say, What Is Truth?" (*Hymns*, no. 272).

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This hymn, as a piece of poetry, was once a part of the Pearl of Great Price. It was set to music and placed in the Latter-day Saint hymnal.

14. *American Dictionary*, s.v. "grace."
15. Smith, *Teachings*, 187–88.
16. The Savior was already the spirit Son of God. He was also the physical Son. But it was the reception of the divine attributes of light and truth by which He was glorified and gained eternal life. Accordingly, He became the spiritual or eternal Son of God when He received of the fulness of the Father.
17. Smith, *Teachings*, 346–47.