
Can We Rely on Feelings?

Mormons are taught to determine objective truth by their subjective feelings. In an 1829 revelation (D&C 9:8-9), Joseph Smith proclaimed the way to know what is or is not from God, “But, behold, I say unto to you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But, if it be not right you shall have no such feelings...” By this test, Mormons have always believed that any good feeling is a “right” or “true” answer from God, and any bad feeling is of the Devil.

Toronto Incident: How to raise money for printing the Book of Mormon?

“Hyrum Smith is represented by David Whitmer as saying that it had been suggested to him that some of the brethren might go to Toronto, Canada, and sell the copyright of the book for considerable money, that is, sell the right to publish the book in the Canadian provinces, not dispose of the copyright absolutely. He persuaded Joseph [Smith] to inquire of the Lord, with the result, as David states it, that he ‘received a revelation that some of the brethren should go to Toronto, Canada, and they would sell the copyright.’ Accordingly, Oliver Cowdery and Hiram Page, the latter being one of the eight witnesses, went to Canada to sell the copyright, but failed. David Whitmer represents that this failure threw the little group of believers into great trouble, and they went to the Prophet and asked him to account for the failure. The Prophet frankly acknowledged his inability to understand the cause for the failure, and inquired of the Lord. He received for his answer—according to Whitmer—this: ‘Some revelations are of God: some revelations are of man: and some revelations are of the devil’” (Comprehensive History of the Church Vol. 1 pp. 162-163).

Points to Consider:

1. Joseph claimed to receive a revelation to go to Toronto to sell the copyright. If he was true to his D&C 9:8-9 revelations, then Smith would have received a good feeling about this revelation.
2. The revelation failed to come to pass. Everyone realized it was not from God.
3. Joseph went back to pray about the failed revelation and claimed this to be the answer: “Some revelations are of God: some revelations are of man: and some revelations are of the devil.”

Questions:

1. If Joseph Smith could not determine by his feelings what came from God, himself or the Devil, how can I trust my feelings to determine what is from God, and what is from my own heart or mind?
2. Since Joseph got this revelation wrong, how can anyone trust any of his other revelations? I.e., how does anyone know that the polygamy revelations did not originate from Joseph’s mind?
3. There are those today who believe that Joseph Smith was a true prophet, that the Book of Mormon is the word of God, and that the Doctrine and Covenants is true scripture, but do not believe that the Mormon prophet, Thomas S. Monson, is a true prophet. They claim to know that their particular prophet (Warren Jeffs, or Stephen Veazey, etc.) is the true prophet, and that their church is the only true church. They believe so because they have prayed and believed that they have received a revelation, based on feeling. If feelings are the determining factor, then why are their personal revelations wrong, and yours are right? How can you be certain?

Does the devil always produce bad feelings in people?

1. If so, then everyone would be wise to him, and no one would follow him. Do people, seeking to please and glorify God, typically get a bad feeling about something, yet choose to do it anyway?
2. Are people who are deceived, aware that they are deceived? John 16:2-3 “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things they will do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.”

The devil successfully tempts and deceives people because his appearance and what he offers is appealing.

2 Cor. 11:14-15 “And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness...”

Matt. 7:15 “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing...”

Proverbs 26:24-26 “A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit.

Though his speech is charming do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart. His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.”

It is possible for the devil's servants (living people) to perform supernatural acts, seemingly miraculous (of God).

Matt. 24:24 "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they will deceive the very elect.

Exodus 7:10-12a "So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the Lord commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake."

Feelings can lie to us because our hearts tend to lead us toward evil.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

Proverbs 28:26 "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.

Mark 7:20-23 "And he said, That which cometh out of a man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."

How can we know the truth?

1. Test the spirits—1 John 4:1, 6 "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets have gone out into the world...We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us: he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."

Listening to Christ's early-Church apostles is crucial to knowing who is following God.

2. Scripture is a reliable source of truth—2 Timothy 3:16-17 "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

John 17:17—Jesus prayed "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

Acts 17:11-12 "These were more noble than those at Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so..."

3. God's word is eternal and incorruptible—Matthew 5:18 For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Matt. 24:35 "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

Isaiah 40:8 "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

Manuscript evidence for the Bible:

1. 5,686 Greek manuscripts for the New Testament and 19,284 manuscripts in other languages (The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Josh McDowell p. 34).

Manuscripts come from different time periods (between 70 A.D. to 450 A.D.) and from different locations, but all agree with each other (no major changes in meaning).

2. Copying the Old Testament—"The Masoretes were well disciplined and treated the text 'with the greatest imaginable reverence, and devised a complicated system of safeguards against scribal slips. They counted, for example, the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurs in each book; they pointed out the middle letter of the Pentateuch and the middle letter of the whole Hebrew Bible, and made even more detailed calculations than these. 'Everything countable seem to be counted,' says Wheeler Robinson, and they made up mnemonics by which the various totals might be readily remembered.—F.F. Bruce" (The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Josh McDowell p. 75).

3. The find at Qumran caves—"First and foremost, the Dead Sea Scrolls take the textual scholar back about one thousand years earlier than previously known Hebrew manuscript evidence. Prior to the Qumran discoveries, the earliest complete copies of the Old Testament books dated from about the early tenth century A.D. The earliest complete copy of the entire Old Testament dated from the early eleventh century A.D. The Dead Sea manuscripts thus give much earlier evidence for the text of the Old Testament than anything previously known. (Brotzman, OTTC, 94-95)" (The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Josh McDowell p. 81).