I am painfully aware that Christianity today does not evidence a uniform understanding of the basic doctrines taught by Jesus Christ.

The scores of churches with their varied creeds and interpretations seem to lead away from, rather than toward, that glorious fulfillment assured by Paul when “we all come in the unity of the faith. . . .” (Eph. 4:13.)

This confusion, tragic as it is, and disheartening to some, does not disprove the testimony that the scriptures declare the word of God. What it does prove is that conflicting interpretations of scriptural doctrine are being made in the feeble, flickering light of man’s wisdom. This naturally brings confusion, because the things of God cannot be understood through the natural senses or learning of men. (1 Cor. 1:17-2:16.)

The principle of revelation is the key that opens the mind and spirit of man to an understanding of the gospel. There is no other key to this knowledge. Thinkers have philosophized, poets have dreamed, and scientists have experimented, but only God speaks with a sure knowledge of all truth.

Some years ago I listened to a lecturer at a university who, after arguing long and deviously, came to the conclusion that there is no such thing as religious knowledge. Limited to the extent of his awareness, he was right—he had no religious knowledge. And he could not obtain any because he had ruled out revelation.

It is my witness that by the power of God, truth concerning the eternal verities with which the gospel deals has been revealed in the past, is now being revealed, and will continue in the future to be communicated to men by revelation from heaven. Revelation is the age-old established law by which God communes with men.

Now, since the doctrine is true that “the things of God knoweth no man, but [by] the Spirit of God [and that] God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. . . .” as taught by Paul (1 Cor. 2:11,10), there must be personal revelation, that is, revelation to individuals, by which they may understand the basic revelations and receive soul-satisfying confirmation as to their divinity. The scriptures clearly affirm that there is such a voice of the Spirit. (Matt. 16:16-17; 1 Cor. 12:3.) The Lord teaches specifically and emphatically that such guidance is available to every man and that, if followed, it would lead to a solution to our problems—individual, national, and international:

“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 the Father teacheth him of the covenant . . . which is confirmed upon you for your sakes, and . . . for the sake of the whole world.” (D&C 84:46,48.)

On the other hand, those who reject the guidance of the Spirit become carnal, sensual, and devilish, and move in the opposite direction.

Lehi put it this way: “Wherefore, men are free . . . to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great mediation of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil; for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself.” (2 Nephi 2:27.)

This matter of obtaining and following the guidance of the Spirit cannot be overemphasized, for it is the issue that separates the righteous from the wicked. “Whoso cometh not unto me,” says the Lord, “is under the bondage of sin....

“And by this you may know the righteous from the wicked, and that the whole world groaneth under sin and darkness even now.” (D&C 84:51, 53.)

Jesus told Nicodemus that:

“God sent . . . his Son into the world . . . that the world through him might be saved.

“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already. . . .

“And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

“For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

“But be that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.” (John 3:17-21.)

These teachings clearly establish the fact that the guidance received by each individual is strictly his own responsibility. Each is given his free agency, and each is held responsible for his exercise of it.

There is no middle ground. When men reject the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they are left to their own wisdom and to the promptings of the evil spirit. They may “have joy in their works for a season,” but by and by the end cometh, and they are hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence there is no return.” (3 Nephi 27:11.) History, the scriptures, and daily experience all eloquently confirm this truth. The uninspired wisdom of men will never extract us from our difficulties.
**Prayer—Man Communicates with God**

If you would obtain and keep the guidance of the Spirit, you can do it by following this simple three-point program:

First, **pray diligently.** Learn to talk to the Lord; call upon his name in great faith and confidence. Second, **live Righteously.** Repent of your sins by confessing them and forsaking them; then conform to the teachings of the gospel and give service in the Church. Third, **study.** Study the gospel as you might study sciences and other scholastic courses. If you will do these things, you will get the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and you will go through this world successfully, regardless of what the people of this world do.

Just as revelation is the means by which God communicates with men, prayer is the means by which men communicate with God. Therefore, prayer is one of our most important subjects for consideration. Jesus inspired us with the hope to become like our Father, for he said, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matt. 5:48.) No one ever reaches this perfection except those who are guided to it by him who is perfect. And guidance from him is to be had only through prayer.

No prayer is effective unless it is sincere. As he taught the multitude, Jesus said, “And when thou prayest thou shalt not do as the hypocrites, for they love to pray . . . that they may be seen of men.” (3 Nephi 13:5.) Continuing with his instructions, he said to use no vain repetition. Then, in what has come to be known universally as the Lord’s Prayer, he gave a pattern for prayer.

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” (3 Nephi 13:9-13.)

In addition to sincerity, two other elements of prayer are emphasized in this scripture. One is the expression of reverence to the Father; the other is a requirement that we forgive our debtors. It is interesting to note that in three of the five verses in the Lord’s Prayer (as quoted from Third Nephi, and which is a little shorter than in Matthew), he pays reverential deference to his Father in heaven. Only two of the five verses contain requests for the petitioner, and neither of these requests goes to temporal matters. On the contrary, they both have to do with the petitioner’s conduct. One is a plea for deliverance from the adversary: “. . . lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” The other is a plea for forgiveness in the same manner that we forgive our debtors. Jesus apparently attached great importance to the phrase, “. . . forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,” because after he had concluded his prayer, he went on to say:

“For, if ye forgive men their trespasses your Heavenly Father will also forgive you; “But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (3 Nephi 13:14-15.)

When we pray, we should consciously, direct our prayers to God, our Heavenly Father. We neither pray to saints nor to an unknown god. “The only instance of praying to saints, mentioned in the Bible,” says Richard Cecil, “is that of the rich man in torment calling upon Abraham; and let it be remembered that it was practiced only by a lost soul and without success.” (The *New Dictionary of Thoughts*, comp. Tryon Edwards [Standard Book Company, 1959], p. 506.) There is a world of difference between a prayer contentedly addressed to our Father in heaven and one addressed to some saint or an unknown god. No man prays to a hypothetical god with any faith or expectation that his petition will receive sympathetic consideration, but one can pray to the true and living God conceived as our Eternal Father—the father of our spirits, a loving parent interested in his children as individuals, even as we are interested in our own children. Paul held that such belief is essential to true prayer, for he said: “. . . he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Heb. 11:6.)

It is also clear from the scriptures that one must pray in faith. It is apparent that there is a direct relationship between the strength of one’s faith and the effectiveness of his prayer. There is, however, a principle associated with this matter of faith that we should all understand. I used to feel that if I could develop enough faith, I could receive in every instance exactly what I prayed for. This belief was based upon such scriptures as Matthew 17:20, in which Jesus said to his disciples, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” But at that time I had not learned that this promise was made upon the implied condition that one’s request be made in harmony with the will of God.

We learned this principle in our home through a rather trying experience. During the early years of our married life, my wife and I intensely desired a particular blessing that we thought would be a great blessing, and we set about to obtain it by faith. We asked, we believed, we thought we had faith, but though we fasted often and prayed fervently, the years rolled by without bringing us the object of our prayers.

Finally we concluded that there must be something that we had not fully understood. Further research and prayerful study of the scriptures revealed the fact that we were not
giving proper consideration to the will of the Lord, that we were concentrating our faith and prayers solely upon receiving the particular thing which by predetermination we had set our hearts upon. We had to reconsider the conditions of the promise. We found that Jesus had stated them in full in several places. For example, to the Nephites be said, “.... whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given you.” (3 Nephi 18:20. Italics added.) In the light of this and other scriptures, we came to realize that pending the time we could know what is right and what is expedient, we had to learn to be as earnest in praying “if it be thy will” as we were in presenting our request.

We further learned that the time will come when we shall know the will of God before we ask, and then everything for which we pray will be right and expedient. And that will be when, as a result of righteous living, we shall so enjoy the companionship of the Holy Spirit that he will dictate what we ask. On this point the Lord has said:

“And if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done.

“But know this, it shall be given you what you shall ask.” (D&C 50:29-30; also D&C 46:30 and Helaman 10:5.)

I know from my own experience that prayer is the pathway by which we may come into contact with God and receive direction from him. There have been times in my life when it was very difficult for me to get through to the Lord and when I’ve had to fast and pray for periods each week over long months of time. But it can be done, and you can pray to the Father and receive help in your problems. One need not make serious mistakes in life. If you can learn to walk by the Spirit, you can make every decision in your life correctly.

**Distinguishing True Revelation**

The Lord has given us several tests by which we may know when we have that Spirit. By revelation through the Prophet Joseph, the Lord revealed to Oliver Cowdery a very simple test. Oliver wanted to translate the Book of Mormon records and the Lord finally gave his consent. But Oliver didn’t translate because he didn’t work hard enough. When he complained that the Lord had withdrawn from him the gift to translate, the Lord said:

“Do not murmur, my son, for it is wisdom in me that I have dealt with you after this manner.

“Behold, you have not understood: you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

“But, behold, I say unto 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, but you shall have a stupor of thought. (D&C 9:6-9. Italics added.)

Study your problems, and prayerfully make a decision. Then take that decision and say to the Lord, in simple, honest supplication, “Father, I want to make the right decision. I want to do the right thing. This is what I think I should do; let me know if it is the right course.” Doing this, you can get the burning in your bosom, if your decision is right. If you do not get the burning, then change your decision and submit a new one.

This is the kind of revelation we can all live by. As a matter of fact, without the gift of revelation, which is one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, there could be no Church of Jesus Christ. This is apparent from the obvious fact that in order for this Church to exist, there must be a society of people who individually have testimonies that Jesus is the Christ. According to Paul, such testimonies are revealed only by the Holy Ghost, for he said, “.... no man can say [know] that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” (1 Cor. 12:3.)

Wherever and whenever revelation is operative, manifestations of other gifts of the Holy Ghost are prevalent. This has been so in all dispensations. Among the gifts of the spirit manifest in the apostolic Church, Paul lists wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of -spirits, diverse kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. (1 Cor. 12:8-10.) The New Testament records numerous examples of the manifestations of these gifts.

The Prophet Joseph translated the Book of Mormon by the gift of the Holy Ghost. The directions to him to organize the Church came in like manner. Within a year from the organization of the Church, the Lord set forth in a revelation the gifts that were to be enjoyed in the restored Church. He named all those listed by Paul, to which were added the following:

“To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world.

“To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful.

“And again, to some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know the differences of administration, ....

“And . . . to some to know the diversities of operations, whether they be of God. . .” (D&C 46:13-16.)

By this statement it appears that there are some apparently supernatural manifestations that are not worked by the power of the Holy Ghost. The truth is that there are
many which are not. The world today is full of counterfeit. It has always been so. The Savior himself said, “... there shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch, that, if possible, they shall deceive the very elect, who are the elect according to the covenant.” (Joseph Smith Matthew 1:22.) Those “who are the elect according to the covenant” are members of the Church, so we ourselves are on notice to beware.

This brings us to a most important consideration. Believing as we do in all the gifts named in the 46th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, and knowing that there are counterfeit to them, how are we to distinguish between the true and the false, the genuine and the counterfeit? I shall suggest a few tests which, if applied, will prove of great value in making the distinction.

In May 1831, the Prophet Joseph Smith received instructions from the Lord for the benefit of some elders who “did not understand the manifestations of different spirits abroad in the earth. . . .”

“Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained?

“To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth.

“And then received ye spirits which ye could not understand, and received them to be of God; and in this are ye justified?” The implied answer was that they were not justified.

“. . . he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth?

“Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together.

“And that which doth not edify is not of God, and is darkness.” (D&C 50:13-15, 21-23. Italics added.)

The two keys here, then, are to consider further only that which can be comprehended and to determine whether the alleged supernatural manifestation or teaching is edifying.

The next rule is to find out whether the purported representative of God follows the divine-established procedure. Has he himself received the gift of the Holy Ghost through the prescribed ordinances? If he has not, then his works, whatever they may be, are not the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. There is but one way to obtain the gift of the Holy Ghost. That way is through the prescribed ordinances of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. Said the Prophet Joseph: “Baptism is a holy ordinance preparatory to the reception of the Holy Ghost; it is the channel and key by which the Holy Ghost will be administered.

“The gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands,