

## 8. Do the doctrines and practices of the LDS Church change?

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Some may see change in teachings and practices as an inconsistency or weakness, but to Latter-day Saints change is a sign of the very foundation of strength upon which the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is built—that God is always (yesterday, today, and forever) willing to reveal his will to his people if they are willing to listen and obey. Although the eternal saving principles of God’s plan of salvation for his children do not change, the revelation of those principles and their application—to whom, when, where, how much—varies to meet a myriad of mortal circumstances and God’s purposes and timetable.

Members of the restored Church of Jesus Christ believe that there are many great and important things yet to be revealed (see Articles of Faith 1:9); this indicates that our past and current understanding of things is incomplete and may need adjustment.

### **Line upon Line**

But why doesn’t God give us everything we will ever need to know and be done with it? Because God honors both agency and circumstance and reveals his will as his children are willing and able to receive it and as it is appropriate to fulfill his own purposes. Isaiah taught this principle:

Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts.

For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little. (Isaiah 28:9–10)

This principle is illustrated clearly in the New Testament in terms of an important change in policy or practice in the early Christian church. When Jesus called and first sent out his twelve apostles, he said: “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5–6). Years later Jesus revealed to Peter that it was time for a change. The gospel was now to go to the Gentiles. It took a repeated revelation and a remarkable demonstration of the power of God to convince Peter that this significant change in direction was to be made (see Acts 10).

### **A Living Church**

And so it has been in our own day. Latter-day Saints acknowledge change as an integral part of the living church, a vital dimension of what it means to be led by living prophets. The need for revelation to properly apply the truths of heaven was taught by Joseph Smith in these words:

God said, “Thou shalt not kill;” at another time He said, “Thou shalt utterly destroy.” This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God commands is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire. . . .

... As God has designed our happiness—and the happiness of all His creatures, he never has—He never will institute an ordinance or give a commandment to His people that is not calculated in its nature to promote that happiness which He has designed, and which will not end in the greatest amount of good and glory to those who become the recipients of his law and ordinances.<sup>35</sup>

If such changes were to come by the whims of mortals, there would be serious cause for concern. If those changes come, however, by revelation from God to his duly authorized servants, they are right and God's people are duty bound to accept and obey them.

Globally and historically the principle of growing line upon line is illustrated in God's revealing to various peoples the measure of light and truth they would accept and from which they could benefit. Therefore, it is not surprising to find varying amounts of gospel truth among all cultures, philosophical systems, world religions, and the many Christian churches existing in the world. Some, in fact, enjoy much of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and their adherents are wonderful examples of Christian living. However, Latter-day Saints believe that there is something called the "fulness of the gospel" that is available to those who desire it. That fulness was restored to the earth through Joseph Smith and is proclaimed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It includes belief in living prophets who are called by God and to whom he reveals his will. These prophets and others ordained by them have authority to preach the gospel and perform essential saving ordinances. They are charged with the same responsibility Jesus gave the original twelve apostles: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). As they move forward in an effort to fulfill that commission, they will seek and receive more revelation from God. Undoubtedly, as circumstances change, so will policies, practices, levels of understanding, and application of principles change. And under the direction of the Almighty the work of the living church will steadily move forward, all as a part of bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of man, which is the work and glory of God (see Moses 1:39).

## Note

35. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 256–57.