

Attaining God's Glory

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A well-known and frequently cited scripture within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is found in the Pearl of Great Price. Any Mormon could probably recite it from memory.

For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. (Moses 1:39)

It is nearly certain that when this scripture is used, it is in a capacity to explain how important work is to God: how He works to make sure we live with Him again, and how we work to help one another live with Him again.

It is rare to hear this scripture used to discuss how the glory of God is connected to our immortality and eternal life, and it is this connection I wish to address.

To demonstrate this connection I will start by defining eternal life and immortality. I will discuss what glory is and how we can use it to obtain eternal life. One of the most important steps to attaining glory is attaining knowledge. I will discuss knowledge — and the related truth and light — in depth and how we can obtain it. Finally, I will use the vision of the tree of life to illustrate additional ways of finding truth.

Before I proceed, I think it is important that we understand what we mean when we say both eternal life and immortality.

Immortality

Jacob, the brother of Nephi, taught that immortality is the restoration of the body and spirit after death.

[The] spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls,

having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect. (2 Ne 9:13)

A similar teaching was presented by Amulek, the missionary companion of Alma the Younger, to Zeezrom. He stated that immortality is living forever in an incorruptible state.

I say unto you that this mortal body is raised to an immortal body, that is from death, even from the first death unto life, that they can die no more; their spirits uniting with their bodies, never to be divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal, that they can no more see corruption. (Alma 11:45)

From these passages then, we define immortality as the body and spirit existing forever in a unified, restored, incorruptible state.

Eternal Life

If immortality can be described as living forever, then eternal life can be described as living with God. Actually, that is precisely how I have heard it explained. In reality, that does not accurately describe what eternal life is.

First, and above all, we must understand that eternal life is the greatest gift God has given us (or rather has potentially given us).

[If] you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God. (D&C 14:7)

Second, eternal life is a result of (or fruit of) the love of God. We receive eternal life because God loves us. It is not simply a reward for being good.

[The fruit of the tree of life] is most precious and most desirable above all other fruits; yea, and it is the greatest of all the gifts of God. (1 Ne. 15:36)

Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God . . . (1 Ne 11:21–22)

Third, eternal life is God's life, or the life God lives. We learn in Moses 7:35 that one of God's names is "Eternal".

Behold, I am God; Man of Holiness is my name; Man of Counsel is my name; and Endless and Eternal is my name, also.

Similarly, but more specifically, in D&C 19:10–12, we learn that eternal (or endless) punishment is God's punishment.

For, behold, the mystery of godliness, how great is it! For, behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore—Eternal punishment is God's punishment. Endless punishment is God's punishment.

By the same definition then, we can assume that eternal life can mean "God's life" or the life God lives.

One could probably pen many pages discussing what constitutes God's life. That tangent is far removed from the purpose of my writings, so for argument's sake, I define eternal life as God's life given to us out of love.

Glory

With those terms defined, I would like to go on to talk about what the glory of God is and how we can use it to obtain eternal life. Immortality is a gift to all regardless of our religious affiliation.

I believe the scripture that most clearly defines the glory of God is D&C 93:36, which says, "The glory of God is intelligence". Actually, this is consistent with something the Saviour said during his intercessory prayer:

[This] is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (John 17:3)

Here the Saviour is showing a link between eternal life and knowing God and him. The link between knowledge and the hereafter is further supported by D&C 130:18:

Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.

Gaining intelligence

Yet how does one come to know God? John suggests such knowledge comes as a result of loving others:

[Let] us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (1 John 4:7-8)

Furthermore, Mormon taught that Christ's pure love is what defines charity (see Moro. 7:47). Not only should we show love for others, but also it must be as Jesus's love. In fact, Ether goes further on to say that we cannot be saved without charity.

[Except] men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father. (Ether 12:34)

It is not enough for us just to love; we must have charity, loving as Jesus did. On that note, the prophet Mormon taught us that fervent prayer is integral to gaining Christ's love:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ. (Moro. 7:48)

The remainder of D&C 93:36 goes on to equate intelligence with light and truth (see also verse 29). This is an important connection to make when we consider the Lord's words in verse 28 of the same section.

He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things. (D&C 93:28)

This connection between truth and Jesus is apparent elsewhere. For example, Jesus taught that he was the way back to the Father.

I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

So now, we understand that gaining the intelligence necessary to know God is dependent on our keeping the commandments of Jesus and loving others as he did.

Once we have receive a knowledge of God's glory and tasted of charity, King Benjamin tells us we must follow certain steps to increase in our knowledge of God's glory.

I say unto you as I have said before, that as ye have come to the knowledge of the glory of God, or if ye have known of his goodness and have tasted of his love, and have received a remission of your sins, which causeth such exceedingly great joy in your souls, even so I would that ye should remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and your own nothingness, and his goodness and long-suffering towards you, unworthy creatures, and humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily, and standing steadfastly in the faith of that which is to come, which was spoken by the mouth of the angel. . . . If ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, or in the knowledge of that which is just and true. (Mosiah 4:11-12)

King Benjamin said that if we humble ourselves, remember God's goodness and long suffering toward us, pray daily, and stand steadfastly in faith, we will increase our knowledge of God's glory.

In addition to understanding how to attain intelligence, we must also understand something of the nature of gaining it. One characteristic of the nature of gaining intelligence is that it is incremental. For example, John the Beloved taught that Jesus did not attain his full glory all at once.

And 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)

This is also implied in D&C 93:28 as I mentioned above; that is, we continue receiving truth and light until we know all things.

Another characteristic is that it is inherently tied to agency. In order for us to attain knowledge, we must be tempted; or rather we must have choice. To know what is sweet, we must be able to choose between bitter and sweet.

[It] must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves; for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet (D&C 29:39).

While that choice is there, the light and truth, or intelligence, will come only as we keep the commandments.

[Every] soul who forsaketh his sins and cometh unto me, and calleth on my name, and obeyeth my voice, and keepeth my commandments, shall see my face and know that I am (D&C 93:1)

Likewise, as we break the commandment or are disobedient, we lose light and truth.

[That] wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men (D&C 93:39)

It seems then that glory, or intelligence, is attained in stages over time. If we add our previous conclusion to this one, we understand that gaining intelligence is dependent on our keeping commandments and loving others

as Jesus did, and obedience and charity are developed (or perfected) incrementally over time.

Truth

As I stated earlier, glory is sometimes defined as truth.

The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth.

Not only should we strive to attain (or even understand) intelligence to gain God's glory, we must also understand the nature of truth. D&C 93:24 defines truth as follows:

[Truth] is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.

In addition, during his intercessory prayer, Jesus defined truth as God's word (see John 17:17 and D&C 84:45). This idea is further strengthened when we examine Lehi's dream in 1 Nephi 8 and Nephi's interpretation of it in 1 Nephi 11. We understand that the word of God (or as we saw above, truth) is depicted as an iron rod, which then leads to the tree of life. The tree, in turn, represents the love of God, and as we discussed earlier, its fruit represents eternal life. Thus, we see that truth leads us to the love of God and leads us to partake of eternal life. Furthermore (considering D&C 93:24), the knowledge of all things past, present, and future, also leads us to the love of God and, subsequently, eternal life.

So how do we attain such truth?

We attain truth by keeping the commandments, just as we stated previously. As we do so, we receive truth and light, until we are glorified in truth and know all things (see D&C 93:28).

In addition, Mormon implies that searching the scriptures results in our gaining knowledge of truth. In describing Mosiah's sons, he stated the following:

[They] had waxed strong in the knowledge of the truth; for they were men of a sound understanding and they had searched the scriptures diligently, that they might know the word of God. (Alma 17:2)

Interestingly enough, the final verse of D&C 93 (the section that expounds the most on glory, intelligence and truth) leaves a charge for us to study more than just scripture.

[It] is my will that you should . . . obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man, and all this for the salvation of Zion. (D&C 93:53)

Just as interesting are two similar charges in the Doctrine and Covenants.

[Study] and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people. (D&C 90:15)

[Seek] ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith. (D&C 88:118)

While these three verses do not refer specifically to gaining truth, I think they are still valuable considering the context of knowing all things past, present and future.

Light

In D&C 88:6, we start to learn about the nature of light.

He [meaning Jesus] that ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth.

Here we see that in order to become the light of truth, Jesus needed to descend below all things. In other words, he needed to experience more pain and suffering than any one person would. As such, he then was able to comprehend everything. Of course, as Jesus comprehended all things, he

gained a “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come”, thus becoming a source of truth

Light, however, is not just truth, nor is it just intelligence.

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)

Here we see that light is also spirit. In my opinion, I believe that light being spirit is what allows it to enter our body.

That being said, it is not required for us to go through all Jesus did in order to comprehend all things. In fact, D&C 88 states that if we are dedicated to God’s glory, we can be filled with light and then comprehend all things.

[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. Therefore, sanctify yourselves that your minds become single to God, and the days will come that you shall see him; for he will unveil his face unto you, and it shall be in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will. (D&C 88:67–68)

In addition, as we stated earlier, our receiving of light also depends on keeping the commandments (see D&C 93:28). Likewise, disobedience to God’s commandments results in the loss of light (see D&C 93:39).

During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said the following:

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.

Here we see two things. First that our eyes (whether physically or spiritually) are the focal point of light for our bodies. Second, if we are dedicated to God’s glory, our entire bodies are filled with light.

It is interesting to note that Joseph Smith said all spirit is matter (see D&C 131:7). In that respect then, it appears that since light is spirit and spirit is matter, light takes up space in our body, so it literally fills our body.

The Strait and Narrow Path

I would like to expound further on Lehi's vision of the tree of life (see 1 Ne. 8). Specifically, discussing the strait and narrow path as it relates to attaining truth. In 2 Nephi 31:17–18, Nephi shows the relationship between the strait and narrow path and baptism.

[The] gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost. And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way ye should receive.

In this passage, we see that part of getting on the path to eternal life (the one that parallels the iron rod) is repentance, baptism, baptism of fire for the remission of sins, and receiving the Holy Ghost.

Nephi's usage of the word "gate" is interesting when we compare it to the Lord's words in Moses 7:53.

I am Messiah, the King of Zion, the Rock of Heaven, which is broad as eternity; whoso cometh in at the gate and climbeth up by me shall never fall; wherefore, blessed are they of whom I have spoken, for they shall come forth with songs of everlasting joy.

When we bring the two scriptures together, we begin to see something interesting. For example, why would we need to climb the strait and narrow path? Understanding what "strait" means offers some insight to this question. The American Heritage Dictionary defines the usage of strait as an adjective as thus:

Difficult; stressful.
Having or marked by limited funds or resources.
Archaic.
Narrow.
Affording little space or room; confined.
Fitting tightly; constricted.
Archaic. Strict, rigid, or righteous.

Here we see then that the strait and narrow path could be described as a difficult path. Even the Webster's 1828 Dictionary (usage common in Joseph Smith's time) shows a similar definition.

Narrow; close; not broad.
Close; intimate; as a strait degree of favor.
Strict; rigorous.
Difficult; distressful.
Straight; not crooked.

Again, the strait and narrow path then is one that is narrow, difficult, and strict. It would make sense then that it would be a path we need to climb and one where Jesus would need to assist us. With that understanding, 2 Nephi 31:20 can be seen in an entirely different light.

[Ye] must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men.
Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

Such actions as pressing forward with steadfastness and enduring to the end are clarified when understanding that the strait and narrow path is not simply a level path on which we walk to the tree of life. In addition, feasting upon the word of Christ brings on an entirely different meaning when we realize that we use the iron rod to help us in our difficult climb to the tree. In other words, when we deal with stressful and difficult times in our lives, it is only through truth that we will overcome and endure them.

This also clarifies the scripture John 14:6, which describes Jesus as the way, truth and life. After all, it is only through him that we can climb the strait and narrow path to eternal life.

Conclusion

In summary, we know that immortality is the body and spirit existing forever in a unified, restored, incorruptible state, and eternal life is God's life given to us out of love. We also know that receiving God's glory is dependent on attaining knowledge of God.

Coming to God requires that we keep the commandments and love others as Jesus did. Developing (or perfecting) this obedience and charity can only be done incrementally over an extended period of time. Likewise, we gain the knowledge mentioned above in stages.

We learn that truth leads us to the love of God and to partake of eternal life. The truth leads us, however, only as we press forward through difficulty and stress, study scripture, have hope, and love everyone.