

CALLING & ELECTION

SEEKING DILIGENTLY YOUR CALLING

Seek Diligently.....	1
The Calling and Election.....	1
Peter: Called and Elected.....	2
The First Key: Knowledge.....	2
The Second Key: Calling and Election.....	3
Teachings On the Calling & Election.....	4
The Doctrine in the 19th Century.....	4
The Doctrine in the 20th Century.....	6
Views on the Doctrine Today.....	7
Seeking the Calling and Election.....	9
What is Our Role?.....	9
The Spirit of Elijah: Being Called and Elected.....	9
The Covenants of Our Fathers.....	10

SEEK DILIGENTLY

“Oh! I beseech you to go forward, go forward and make your calling and your election sure,” Joseph Smith pleaded.¹ To have the sure promises of the Lord, Jesus Christ, is one of the grandest blessings the Father can offer. It is beautiful and filled with peace, and becomes a centerpiece for one’s devotion of faith.

This subject occupied the young prophet’s mind on several occasions as he preached in Nauvoo. Why is it that Joseph was so adamant about this topic? And why do we not hear much about it today?

THE CALLING AND ELECTION

The term “calling and election” comes out of Peter’s second letter to those of “like precious faith” to him and the other apostles. “Brethren,” he urged, “give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:1, 10).²

¹ "History, 1838–1856, volume F-1 [1 May 1844–8 August 1844]," p. 19, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed September 17, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-f-1-1-may-1844-8-august-1844/25>.

² Note that references from the Old and New Testament are taken from the Joseph Smith inspired version of the Bible. Any deviance in the King James Version of the Bible is noted in brackets following the reference.

Joseph Smith spoke adamantly about Peter's words. He clarifies Peter's words, stating, "To have a positive promise of your own Salvation is making your calling & election sure, Viz the voice of Jesus saying my beloved thou shalt have eternal life."³ In short, it is to have a promise of eternal life from the voice of Jesus Christ.

This concept runs throughout scripture, though it has always been somewhat of an ambiguous term until Joseph Smith explained it in more plain terms. "Now brethren," Joseph replied, "who can explain this no man be [but] he that has obtained these things in the same way that Peter did." Joseph knew what Peter meant in his epistle because Joseph knew the spirit of prophecy, and because Joseph had experienced the same. Joseph continued, "Yet it is so plain & so simple & easy to be understood that when I have shown you the interpretation thereof you will think you have always Known it yourselves."⁴

PETER: CALLED AND ELECTED

In his second epistle, recorded in the New Testament, Peter recalls his eyewitness account of the transfiguration of the Savior on the mount when the voice of God the Father called out, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Peter adds, "This voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." Yet more important in Peter's mind than hearing the voice of the Father proclaim the divinity of his Son was receiving a "more sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:18-19).

"These are but hints at those things that were revealed to Peter," Joseph says, "and verily brethren there are things in the bosom of the Father, that have been hid from the foundation of the world that are not known neither can be except by direct Revelation."⁵

Joseph revealed how to understand the doctrine taught here by Peter by expounding on his epistle. "There are two keys. One key [is] knowledge. The other mak[ing] your calling & election sure, for if you do these things you shall never fall."⁶ Some additional accounts of the same discourse suggest he stated there are three keys hidden in this chapter:

1. *Key Knowledge is the power of Salvation*

2. *Key Make his calling and Election Sure*

3. *it is one thing to be on the mount & hear the excellent voice &c &c. and another to hear the voice declare to you you have a part & lot in that kingdom.*⁷

THE FIRST KEY: KNOWLEDGE

In Peter's epistle, he addresses the doctrine of calling and election to those "that have obtained like precious faith" with him in the Savior Jesus Christ. Peter continues:

³ "Discourse, 21 May 1843, as Reported by Howard Coray," p. 36-46, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 17, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-21-may-1843-as-reported-by-howard-coray/1>. (Hereafter "Discourse, 21 May 1843, as Reported by Howard Coray.")

⁴ *Discourse*, 21 May 1843, as Reported by Howard Coray.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 2, 10 March 1843–14 July 1843," p. [217], *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 20, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-2-10-march-1843-14-july-1843/225>.

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature.

2 Peter 1:1-4

Note here the small chiasmus that Peter throws in to emphasize how “all things pertaining to life and godliness” were received.

A Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the **knowledge of God**, and of Jesus our Lord,
B according as his divine power hath given unto us **all things that pertain unto life and godliness**,
A' through the **knowledge of him that hath called us** to glory and virtue;

All things that pertain to life (he is speaking about eternal life here) and to godliness (or “piety” from the Greek word εὐσεβεία (eusebeian)) come because of our knowledge. And more specifically, because of our knowledge of Jesus Christ, he who called us to glory and virtue. Knowledge of truth can liberate us from bondage.

William Clayton recorded that Joseph “shewed that knowledge is power & the man who has the most knowledge has the greatest power.” He continued, “He said the more sure word of prophecy meant, a mans knowing that he was sealed up unto eternal life by revelation & the spirit of prophecy, through the power of the Holy priesthood. He also showed that it was impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance.”⁸

Joseph demonstrated how important knowledge is to salvation. Without knowledge, a man cannot come to know God. But the knowledge we gain has to be true knowledge. Through this knowledge comes “exceeding great and precious promises: that by these [we] might be partakers of the divine nature.”

Peter continues describing how to expand knowledge of Jesus Christ. “Add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity” (2 Peter 1:5-7). These are like building blocks upon one’s faith in both personal refinement and also knowledge of the characteristics of the Lord. Add one piece upon another until you come to the pinnacle: charity, or the pure love of Christ.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all 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, that ye may become the sons of God, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is.

Moroni 7 [7:48]⁹

THE SECOND KEY: CALLING AND ELECTION

As we gain knowledge—or experience—in each of these areas, we become more like the Savior Jesus Christ. “For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Peter 1:8-9). The King James Version translated οὐκ ἀργούς (ouk argous) as “barren.” The literal translation more closely means “not idle” or could be also translated as “ineffective” or “inactive.” When we abound in these Christ-like virtues we grown in grace and peace, glory and virtue. When these things are lacking, we do become idle and unfruitful in the eyes of God.

⁸ "Discourse, 17 May 1843–A, as Reported by William Clayton," p. [16], *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 17, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-17-may-1843-a-as-reported-by-william-clayton/1>.

⁹ Note that scripture references from the Book of Mormon come from the 1830 published edition. The standard 2013 edition reference is found in brackets.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren,” Peter admonishes, “give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:10-11). In the New American Standard Bible (NASB) translation it reads, “Be all the more diligent to make your....” The Greek words used in the Septuagint stresses a need of urgent effort to ensure one’s calling and election.

How does one obtain such a promise? Joseph Smith lectured on this topic as recorded by William Richards:

After a person hath faith in Christ, repents of his sins & is Baptized for the remission of his sins & received the Holy Ghost (by the laying on of hands) which is the first Comforter then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering & thirsting after Righteousness. & living by every word of God & the Lord will soon say unto him Son thou shalt be exalted. &c When the Lord has thoroughly proved him & finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazard. then the man will find his calling & Election made sure then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter which the Lord hath promised the saints as is recorded in the testimony of St John in the XIV ch from the 12th to the 27 verses.¹⁰

In sum, receiving one’s calling and election is to receive the promise of God that you are sealed to him. “It is one thing to receive knowledge by the voice of God, (this is my beloved Son, &c), & another to Know that you yourself will be Saved. to have a positive promise of your own Salvation is making your calling & election Sur, Viz the voice of Jesus Saying my beloved thou shalt have eternal life.” Until we receive this promise, we have no assurance we will enter into his kingdom. Joseph concludes, “Brethren never cease struggling until you get this evidence.”¹¹

TEACHINGS ON THE CALLING & ELECTION

Joseph Smith taught in clear language the importance and means of receiving a one’s own promise from God. His teachings were often focused on instructing individual men and women how to be more like God. He specifically taught about making a calling and election sure, or receiving that more sure word of prophecy, a gateway to accessing the Second Comforter.

Even though it remained a common theme and focus of his teachings, even as early as 1831, that focus changed upon his death. Surprisingly little was said about a calling and election, according to available records, and when it was mentioned it was often quoted as an aside. It did not resurface with any prominence again until the 1960-70s, most notably by Bruce McConkie and Marion Romney. Since that time, the subject has virtually disappeared from the vernacular of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

THE DOCTRINE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Joseph adamantly encouraging his listeners to attain their own promise. There is little reference to this doctrine after the prophet’s death. As the years passed, some discourses were given by leaders of the church referencing Peter’s epistle and this specific topic, but very few focused on the doctrine. It appears in recorded discourses that the doctrine was commonly recognized, but not fully understood as Joseph taught it. They appeared to use it only as a supporting tenet to whatever discourse was being preached at the time.

One of the first recorded instances of a church leader referencing Peter’s assurance of a “more sure word of prophecy” occurs in a discourse given by Amasa Lyman in November 1857 (13 years after the prophet’s death). When reading his discourse, Amasa asserts that those who do not have a more sure word of prophecy should give heed to church leaders

¹⁰ “27 June 1839 (Thursday) Commerce, Hancock County, Illinois,” *The Words of Joseph Smith*, eds. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980). Accessed online 17 September 2020 at <https://rsc.byu.edu/book/words-joseph-smith>. See also Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973) 3:380. (Hereafter *History of the Church*.)

¹¹ *Discourse*, 21 May 1843, as Reported by Howard Coray.

until they can get their own. When referencing the doctrine, he quotes not Joseph’s inspired version, but the King James version.

Adopt the old Apostle’s maxim—‘We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the day star arise in your hearts.’ (2nd Peter, chap. I. 19.)

Listen to and carry out the instructions of brother Brigham, of brother Heber, and of all that speak the words of life and salvation unto you.¹²

Amasa viewed Peter’s words as a “maxim” or exhortation to follow the apostle’s words—and other apostles’ words—until they receive their own. This scriptural interpretation seems supportive of a reading of 2 Peter 1:19 from the King James version, where the emphasis on taking heed seems to focus on the word “we” meaning those who have that more sure word of prophecy. Yet that was not the intent of Peter’s appeal. We see this subtle difference as we read the inspired version of the King James’ Version.

Joseph Smith’s inspired version of Peter’s letter helps to give clarity to Peter’s intent. Compare the two writings from the King James’ version and the Joseph Smith inspired version (see below). There is a stark difference to the subject with which the adherents were to take heed. In the King James version, it sounds like Peter is saying essentially that since he has the more sure word of prophecy, others should listen to him until they can receive it themselves. Whereas, Joseph’s version shows that Peter is urging his adherents to pay diligent attention to this more sure word of prophecy, not to him.

King James Version	Joseph Smith Inspired Version
We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.	We have therefore a more sure knowledge of the word of prophecy, to which word of prophecy ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light which shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.

Joseph taught that word of prophecy is the promise of eternal life available to all, and to be sought by all. Early church leaders either misunderstood or distorted this viewpoint. This misinterpretation of scripture by early church leaders continued to be taught despite the inspired change Joseph received for the verses in Peter’s epistle. Records from other church leaders, including Brigham Young, verify that this was the common interpretation. These leaders believed the “more sure word of prophecy” was inspired revelations from the ancient apostles and from Joseph Smith, and others. Can you see the subtle difference in interpretation? Read what Brigham Young teaches:

We have not only the sure word of prophecy delivered in the days of the Apostles, but we actually have that surer word of prophecy delivered to us through the Prophet Joseph, that in the last days the Lord would gather Israel, build up Zion, and establish His kingdom upon the earth. This is a more sure word of prophecy than was delivered in the days of the Apostles, and is a greater work than they performed.¹³

This interpretation of the scripture directly conflicts with Joseph’s teaching on Peter’s words, distorting the purity of the doctrine Joseph taught. Joseph asserted that Peter was calling those who had a “like precious faith” to focus on receiving their own more sure word from the Lord, which was that “more sure word of prophecy.” Joseph taught clearly that the

¹² Amasa Lyman, “A discourse by Elder Amasa M. Lyman, November 22, 1857,” *Journal of Discourses*, ed. George D. Watt et al (London: Latter-Day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854-1886) 6:82. (Hereafter *Journal of Discourses*.)

¹³ Brigham Young, “Discourse by President Brigham Young, June 23, 1867,” *Journal of Discourses*, 12:64.

more sure word of prophecy was that promise to an individual that he or she would receive eternal life, not a conglomeration of latter-day revelations.

Erastus Snow gave a discourse on interpreting ancient scripture, particularly the end-time prophecies. Erastus counseled not to make personal interpretations of the scriptures. He evidences the continued misinterpretation Peter's letter.

I am aware that many people of our time attempt to place some mystical and illusive construction upon the prophecies in the Bible, and there is a disposition to ignore the plain and obvious meaning of the declarations of the Prophets, and to give them some private interpretation. But the Apostle Peter, in the first chapter of his second epistle, in writing to his brethren on this subject, says that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, but holy men of old spoke as they were moved upon by the Holy Ghost. In order that they might be able to understand these prophecies, the Apostle counseled his brethren to give heed unto them as unto a light shining in a dark place until the day dawn and the day star arose in their hearts.¹⁴

In this discourse, Erastus uses Peter's epistle as a means to discourage others from interpreting scripture privately, but instead, heed the guidance and interpretations of the leaders of the church. There is subtle irony in his words. While he urges people to carefully avoid interpreting the ancient prophecies and not ignore those "plain and obvious" declarations of the prophets, he starkly misinterprets Peter's words by ignoring Joseph's plain and obvious inspired rewriting of Peter's epistle. Such misinterpretation and misuse of scripture appears regularly throughout church and world history.

This distorted view of the scripture became a call for the necessity of heeding to the words of "living oracles" over one's own revelations that heavily appears in the teachings of the church today. Charles Penrose declared how Peter's words--again quoting the King James' version--emphasized the importance of listening to the living oracles. "We then have 'a more sure word of prophecy' than the things that were written aforetime," he said. He described in his discourse that they of ancient days listened to ancient prophet and we of modern days listen to "living oracles, those who are called and ordained to stand between us and the Lord."¹⁵

The evolution of thought moves away from encouraging a man or woman to come to the face of God by receiving their own sure word of prophecy and instead encourages men and women to become reliant upon the word of those who lead the church, claiming that those "living oracles" stand between man and God. How far the doctrine strayed in only 40 years from Joseph's declaration that each man and woman can stand before God face to face without someone standing between them. Rather than empowering people to come to God, there began to be added criteria as the years followed restricting people's access to God.

THE DOCTRINE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Those restrictions continued to evolve through the next century, eventually creating a culture where personal revelation is encouraged, but only as long as it fits within the confines of church policy. It is now commonly taught by church leaders from the highest ranks to the local congregations that a man or woman can only receive revelation within their small scope of church-allowed authority—within the scope of their calling and family—and that anything beyond that is the purview of their leaders.

Where Joseph boldly asserted that every man and woman could come to know anything he knew and that making our callings and elections sure should be our highest priority, current church culture ignores the subject or de-emphasizes a man's or woman's ability to come to such a promise. This topic falls within the realm of "deep doctrine." The church teaches that "when you hear the word deep in connection with gospel doctrine, it's sometimes meant to suggest something mysterious, obscure, or difficult to understand."¹⁶ I'll share a personal experience to illustrate this cultural assumption.

¹⁴ Erastus Snow, "Discourse by Erastus Snow, September 14, 1873," *Journal of Discourses*, 16:200

¹⁵ Charles Penrose, "Discourse by Elder Charles W. Penrose, March 4, 1883," *Journal of Discourses*, 24:82.

¹⁶ "Where should I go to learn the really "deep" doctrine of the Church?" *New Era* (June 2017).

In 2013, I was called into my stake president's office to be reprimanded for teaching the "deep doctrine" of the Second Comforter. I had taught a few individuals about the concept of receiving a calling and election. Specifically, I was sharing how they could come to have their own personal promise of exaltation from God. The stake president did not appreciate me taking that liberty, and did not believe I or any lay member—including himself—could receive such a promise on our own. He was a very dutiful man, and very loyal to church policy. To validate his point, he stated that he and his wife had faithfully studied the Book of Mormon every night together for decades and always followed the counsel of the church leaders and had never received such a promise from God for himself.

He continued to state that I had "good potential" in the priesthood and that I should not jeopardize my opportunity. I found it curious that my teaching such a doctrine—one taught with urgency by Joseph Smith and Peter—should affect my standing in the church and rights to administer in church priesthood functions. He told me that prior to my meeting with him he had researched the topic of "Calling and Election" to be prepared for our discussion. He stated that this topic had not been taught from the pulpits of general conference since the 1970's. He said very frankly, "If the Brethren don't teach it, you don't teach it." I left our meeting disheartened and troubled. If the Lord through his Spirit and his prophet Joseph encourage me and others to diligently take such steps toward salvation, why would the leaders of the church dissuade me?

The last conference address to mention the term "calling and election" occurred in 1984, presented by Bruce McConkie. He was also the last leader of the church to discuss this doctrine in depth in a general conference address in October 1977. In that speech, he taught about ten blessing of the priesthood. He said the following about blessing #9:

Blessing nine: We have power to make our calling and election sure, so that while we yet dwell in mortality, having overcome the world and been true and faithful in all things, we shall be sealed up unto eternal life and have the unconditional promise of eternal life in the presence of Him whose we are.¹⁷

A handful of leaders during the late 1960's through the early 1980's taught this doctrine in various general conference addresses. Bruce McConkie and Marion Romney were foremost among them, speaking on a few occasions on the subject between 1972-1980. After McConkie mentioned the topic, almost as an aside, in his April 1984 conference address, no leader has broached the subject since. There are a few brief allusion to the broad concept, but nothing specifically teaching, encourage, or even naming the doctrine. The most direct reference to the doctrine since 1984 came from the closing remarks of Jeffery Holland in his April 2013 conference report.

These things I declare to you with the conviction Peter called the "more sure word of prophecy." What was once a tiny seed of belief for me has grown into the tree of life, so if your faith is a little tested in this or any season, I invite you to lean on mine.¹⁸

VIEWS ON THE DOCTRINE TODAY

Church leaders do still acknowledge this teaching as a doctrine of the church. In 2014, Robert Millet, an emeritus professor for ancient scripture at BYU, and a church scholar who helps provide doctrinal insight to church leaders, gave a speech on the calling and election at the Sperry Symposium. He acknowledged to the audience that "Latter-day Saint writers, including general Church leaders, have not written of the doctrine of calling and election very often," but asserted the reasoning is due to the "sensitive" nature of the topic. He continued:

Furthermore, because the Brethren have said very little about it publicly, this is not an announcement that we should somehow avoid it like a plague or that the teaching has somehow fallen on hard times or that it's been officially relegated to the category of folklore or pop theology or that it's out of date or that it is no longer held to be the doctrine of the Church.

¹⁷ Bruce R. McConkie, "The Ten Blessing of the Priesthood," *Ensign* (November 1977).

¹⁸ Jeffery Holland, "Lord, I Believe," *Ensign* (November 2013).

For heaven's sake, this precious truth is found in the standard works, within the New Testament and the Doctrine and Covenants, and when it comes to relevance or timeliness in the 21st century, what could be more everlastingly pertinent than the quest for eternal life and the sweet assurance that one's salvation is secure?¹⁹

Even with the endorsement of Robert Millet, there is still a woeful lack of discussion on the topic, especially given the energy in which Joseph Smith used to teach the doctrine. Somehow, since the time of Joseph's bold-faced declarations of the doctrine to the saints, the teaching has become obscure and "sensitive," therefore, rarely discussed. The general membership of the church does not seem to have an in-depth knowledge of the history of the church, including the contrasting teachings from Joseph Smith compared to current leaders. When I taught the subject to members, they had all heard of the doctrine, but a woeful few knew much about it, and fewer still pursued the promise. One man told me that he did not feel right asking for the promise because he felt the Lord had more important things to do.

In current church culture, those who seek to better understand this doctrine in any significant depth often find themselves in conflict with church leadership. There is an every-growing tension concerning the limitations of what types of personal revelation church members are allowed to receive.

Reporting on a Cassanda Hedelius' presentation at a conference sponsored by the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR), a group not affiliated with the church, R. Scott Lloyd stated she "identified a potential point of misunderstanding in the Mormon faith between the principle that everyone can and should receive personal revelation through the Holy Ghost and that God calls prophets to receive essential revelations that are binding on each Church member."

The article stated there is a spiritual threat within the church because of this difference. Hedelius continued to assert that most church members are able to resolve these type of tensions without much trouble, yet there are those who do not resolve that tension well. The speaker termed the "particular set of assumptions and interpretation" of these dissatisfied members as "Mormon gnosticism."

Borrowing the term from religious history, she defined Mormon gnosticism as 'the belief that esoteric knowledge—hidden, deep doctrine—is necessary for fulfilling our spiritual potential, and that seeking for it is more spiritually advanced.'

Sister Hedelius said such thought among some Church members 'emphasizes that each individual can get revelation and downplays the role of prophets.'

In defining the hallmark attributes of those whom she categorizes in this dissident group of members, she lists seeking the Second Comforter—or obtaining your calling and election, or a more sure word of prophecy—as one of the concerning issues. She describes the concern as:

An inordinate interest in the Second Comforter, complaints that the Church does not teach such subjects enough, and belief that books or teachings by individuals other than Church leaders are the best way to obtain these teachings.²⁰

It is interesting that an "inordinate interest" in receiving that Second Comforter is not only downplayed, but labeled as a distinguishing feature—or hallmark attribute—of dissident Latter-day Saints members. Pursuing the face of the Savior and receiving a promise of our own salvation is viewed as pursuing "esoteric knowledge." Yet in order to receive such a promise, as stated by Joseph Smith, one needs to have a fixated drive to obtain it. Is it no wonder that few understand the doctrine, or even persistently pursue it? Who wants to be reprimanded or even excommunicated for seeking God? Yet in many ways, that is choice the church leaves: follow God's voice or follow the church leaders.

¹⁹ R. Scott Lloyd, "Symposium Speaker Discusses Fruits of 'Precious Faith,'" *Church News*, 6 November 2014. Accessed 18 September 2020 at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/symposium-speaker-discusses-fruits-of-precious-faith?lang=eng>.

²⁰ R. Scott Lloyd, "FairMormon Conference Speaker Identifies a Spiritual Threat," *Church News*, 19 August 2015. Accessed 18 September 2020 at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/fairmormon-conference-speaker-identifies-a-spiritual-threat?lang=eng>.

SEEKING THE CALLING AND ELECTION

WHAT IS OUR ROLE?

Despite what label others may give to those who seek an audience with the Master, one cannot have an “inordinate interest” in the Second Comforter. How can someone obsess too much about having a personal ministration from the Savior and personal promise from God that he or she is saved? Is that not the purpose of life, to return back to the presence of God? “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). What better manifestation of coming to know God and Jesus Christ than having that more sure word of prophecy?

Those who fascinate and obsess about this doctrine are simply following Joseph Smith’s plea, “Oh! I beseech you to go forward, go forward and make your calling and your election sure,”²¹ as well as Peter’s admonition to “give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10).

There is precious little taught on the subject today. Even though, according to Robert Millet, the topic is not forbidden, those who do receive such blessings or seek after them with all diligence are discouraged, silenced or disciplined for their actions. The cultural mysticism about the calling and election suggests it is reserved for only the highest echelon of the church in view of the membership.

Whatever the reason for not continuing to teach this doctrine, the calling and election is still a doctrine of the church, and more important, it is a true principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The silence of church leaders on the topic does not diminish the importance or vitality of our attaining this blessing. This is the most fundamental blessing of our religious beliefs.

THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH: BEING CALLED AND ELECTED

There is a lot of discussion in the church today about the spirit of Elijah, most of which centers around temple work, particularly for the dead. Yet many see this spirit of Elijah only in terms of performing ordinances for the dead. Joseph taught that the spirit of Elijah is much, much more. Receiving this calling and election is part of the spirit of Elijah.

*The Spirit of Elijah is that degree of power which holds the sealing power of the Kingdom.... This power of Elijah is to that of Elias what in the architecture of the Temple of God those who seal or cement the Stone to their place are to those who cut or hew the stones the one preparing the way for the other to accomplish the work By this we are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise ie Elijah To obtain this sealing is to make our calling and election sure which we ought to give all diligence to accomplish.*²²

Another record of the same discourse records Joseph declaring,

*Make your calling and election sure go on from grace to grace unittl you obtain a promise from God for yourself that you shall have eternal life. this is eternal life to know God and his son Jesus Christ, it is to be sealed up unto eternal life and obtain a promise for our posterity. Whatever you shall bin don earth shall be bound in heaven, this Is the power of Elijah to seal or bind or turn the hearts of the fathers to their children sealed against all sin but the sin of sheding innocent blood and the Sin against the holy ghost.*²³

²¹ "History, 1838–1856, volume F-1 [1 May 1844–8 August 1844]," p. 19, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed September 17, 2020, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-f-1-1-may-1844-8-august-1844/25>.

²² "10 March 1844 (Sunday). At Temple," *The Words of Joseph Smith*, eds. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980).

²³ Ibid.

William Clayton recorded Joseph saying the following:

When speaking of the passage "I will send Elijah the prophet &c" he said it should read and he shall turn the hearts of the children to the covenant made with their fathers Also where it says and they shall seal the servants of God in their foreheads &c it means to seal the blessing on their heads meaning the everlasting covenant thereby making their calling &c election sure.²⁴

THE COVENANTS OF OUR FATHERS

What covenants have our fathers made with God? My heart turns to my ancient fathers, who held the eternal covenants of salvation, meaning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their fathers before them. Speaking of the Melchizedek priesthood, Joseph's discourse given in 1843 was recorded by William Richard as follows:

How shall god come to the rescue of this generation. he shall send Elijah law revealed to Moses in Horeb—never was revealed to the C[hildren] of Israel and he shall reveal the covenants to seal the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers— anointing & sealing—called elected and made sure without father &c. a priesthood which holds the priesthood by right from the Eternal Gods—and not b[y] descent from father and mother.²⁵

God wants us to come back into his presence and become one with him. "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). In order to fulfil this plan, he sent his Son, Jesus Christ to atone for us. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish; but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

It is through Jesus Christ that we can be redeemed, but it is not meant that we need to wait until we are dead to receive the promise of salvation. In fact, the plan of God is to come and make and keep eternal covenants with God and to eventually receive an everlasting covenant of our own from the voice of God while still in this tabernacle of flesh. This is known as the "sealing of the Holy Spirit of promise," the "more sure word of prophecy," or the "calling and election." It is the process of receiving the Second Comforter, and no one can expend too much energy in that pursuit.

Let us be diligent in seeking this promise, in truly embracing the spirit of Elijah, patiently waiting upon the Lord until he is ready to give this blessed and eternal promise. This will be the state of those who will enter into Zion in the final scene of the Lord's second coming. In order to walk and talk with Christ in the New Jerusalem, we will need to seek after and attain our own calling and election.

²⁴ "13 August 1843 (1) (Sunday Morning). Temple Stand," *The Words of Joseph Smith*, eds. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980).

²⁵ "27 August 1843 (Sunday Morning). Temple Grove," *The Words of Joseph Smith*, eds. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980).