

Podcast Episode 42: Cycles of Creation

QUESTION: We often hear about Eternal Progression, but we know precious little about it. You have mentioned that this occurs in “cycles of creation”. What are “cycles of creation,” and how do we progress through them?

DENVER: I told you before in Idaho Falls that, in my view, the Lectures on Faith are scripture. They were adopted as such, and I'm going to read from the Seventh Lecture on Faith, paragraph 9, about Christ:

...where shall we find a saved being? For if we [may] find a saved being, we may ascertain without much difficulty what all others must be in order to be saved...We think that it will not be a matter of dispute that two beings who are unlike each other cannot both be saved, for whatever constitutes the salvation of one will constitute the salvation of every creature which will be saved. And if we find one saved being in all existence, we may see what all others must be or else not be saved. We ask, then, Where is the prototype? Or where is the saved being? We conclude as to the answer [to] this question there will be no dispute among those who believe the bible that it is Christ: all will agree with this, that he is the prototype or standard of salvation, or in other words, ...he is a saved being. And if we should continue our interrogation, and ask how is it that he is saved, the answer would be, because he is a just and holy being. And if he were anything different than what he is he would not be saved, for his salvation depends on his being precisely what he is and nothing else. For if it were possible for Him to change in the least degree, so sure he would fail of salvation and lose all his dominion, power, authority and glory, which constitutes salvation. For salvation consists in the glory, authority, majesty, power and dominion which Jehovah possesses, and in nothing else, and no being can possess it but himself [and] one like him.

We read this, and then we immediately gloss over it, as if what salvation consists of is Him and fairy dust, which He can distribute to make us like Him. This teaching that appears, this was what Joseph Smith worked on editing for the months prior to the publication of the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835. He doesn't say in his diaries that he spent any time on the revelations. That was trusted to a committee. And the committee was responsible for getting those ready for publication. And they did a bunch of freelancing and embellishing and expanding, and some of the stuff they added to the revelations was remarkably more expansive than what Joseph received revealed to him. That's not where Joseph spent his time. He spent his time on the Lectures on Faith, and this is early in his ministry. This is

when he wanted to make sure that the doctrine was correct. And this is the doctrine that came rolling out in that first publication. And yet, despite that, we tend to read this and not take it seriously. If you are going to be saved, you must be exactly, you must be precisely what Christ is and nothing else. O.K.? You! At that moment, that is when you are saved. As a consequence of that, to speak of Christ is necessarily to speak of salvation. To understand Christ is to understand salvation. Despite how plainly this has been put, we still stop short of comprehending the doctrine. Joseph Smith's mind returned to this topic again all the way down to the end of his ministry. In April of 1844—the last general conference of the church that Joseph Smith would be alive for—on April 7th of 1844, Joseph gave a talk. I'm going to first read to you the version that appears in the *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, but then, to make sure that you realize how important the point was, I'm going to go back to the talk as recorded by those who were present that day. Because one matter in this is picked up by everyone of those who was present and recording what was said in their diaries. Joseph says:

I wish it was in a suitable place to tell it, and that I had the trump of an archangel, so that I could tell the story in such a manner that persecution would cease for ever. What did Jesus say? (Mark it, Elder Rigdon!) The Scriptures inform us that Jesus said, As the Father hath power in Himself, even so hath the Son power—to do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious—in a manner to lay down His body and take it up again. Jesus, what are you going to do? To lay down my life as my Father did, and take it up again. Do you believe it? If you do not believe it, [then] you do not believe the Bible. The Scriptures say it, and I defy all the learning and wisdom and all the combined powers of earth and hell together to refute it.

Here then is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you [YOU] have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pgs 346-347).

Exaltation to exaltation, grace to grace, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead. Christ said, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). You must be precisely what He is and nothing else. You hear those who say, The church has all the keys! But we do not yet have the keys of the resurrection. That’s because even when you are resurrected, you will not have the keys of resurrection until you, like Christ, have gone from exaltation to exaltation. Until you, likewise, attain to the power to resurrect all that depends upon you.

“The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever [the Father] doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19). And the Father went before. And the Son follows after. And if you think that you can at some point, like Him, attain to the status of godhood, then you’re going to have to do precisely what it is that the gods do. Therefore, to understand Christ is to understand the challenging destiny about which Joseph Smith is speaking in this last conference talk given in 1844. Until you attain to the resurrection of the dead and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power—even what we envision as the highest heaven is a condescension for those who sit in enthroned, able to dwell in everlasting burnings. Else, why in section 132 would you be given a white stone that reveals things pertaining to a higher order of kingdoms, when you are in the celestial kingdom? It’s because where you are now, at this moment in this meeting, hearing my voice in this room today, is about halfway to where you need to grow. And it’s been almost infinite in getting you here today. In order to arrive at the point that you might be able to be as Christ and where Christ arises to in everlasting burnings is about halfway to where things ultimately can go. You say it’s necessary, in this condition, to have a physical body in order to come down here and perform, and you say that rightly. But there are other places beyond.

He bore record, saying [this is verse 7 of 93]: I saw his glory, that he was in the beginning before the world was. Therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word, even the messenger of salvation—The light and the Redeemer of the world; the Spirit of truth, who came into the world, because the world was made by him, and in him was the life of men and the light of men. The worlds were made by him; men were made by him; all things were made by him, and through him, and of him. And I, John, bear record that I beheld his glory, as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, even the Spirit of truth, which came and dwelt in the flesh, and dwelt among us. And I, John, saw that he received not of the fullness at first, but received grace for grace; And he received not the fullness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness. And thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not the fulness at first (D&C 93:7-14).

John, bearing record of what he saw concerning our Lord before He entered into this world—this is what He did before He came into the flesh to live among us. This is who He was before the world was. He went from grace to grace until He was called the Son of God. Christ went from grace to grace, before this world and before He entered into the flesh here, through a long enough period of development that He had sufficient grace to be called the Son of God. And this is the prototype of the saved man. This is what you must be or else not be saved. This is the *first principles of the gospel* about which we are going to spend some time today so that you might understand who it is you worship and how it is you are

called upon to worship Him. Because as long as you're down here in this veil, clothed in this flesh, with the capacity to make sacrifices and the ability to exercise faith in Him, you will be amazed at the grace you can acquire if you will only do so while in this dark place. You're here to accomplish a great deal.

Our Lord—and we're talking about Him in the beginning, before the world was—received not the fulness at first, but received grace for grace. And we think *grace for grace* consists of: I'm going to now obey a principle, and as a result of obeying that principle, I will receive the benefit of the grace that flows from doing so. And that is true enough. That is a true enough principle, but it is also truer and more accurate to say, in connection with the long preparation that preceded the call of Christ to be the Son of God, that *grace to grace* is also something that involves the upward scale of a ladder, as Joseph alludes to it. He was *called* the Son of God because He received not of the fulness at first. He was *called* to be the Son of God because that wasn't His status before. Therefore, He had to be *called* to be the Son of God. And that was true because He received not of the fulness at first.

And I, John, bear record, and lo, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove, and sat upon him, and there came a voice out of heaven, saying: This is my beloved Son. And I, John, bear record that he received a fulness of the glory of the Father; And he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him. And it shall come to pass, [that] if you are faithful you shall receive the fulness of the record of John. I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness. For if ye keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace (D&C 93:15-20).

Long before the Lord assumed the role and responsibility of descending here and being the Redeemer of this world, He qualified by grace—doing things that proved, while He was behind a veil (as you presently find yourselves situated), that demonstrated graciousness and faith by obedience to the commandments of God, even though it would be a great while yet before He (and now you) would rise up to that level—still, He lived his life with such grace that He qualified to receive more and to develop and move up.

And I want to move to Alma 13. Because in Alma 13 we run up against some of the other suggestions in the scriptures about what it takes to move from grace to grace. Beginning in chapter 13 of Alma, verse one:

I would that ye should remember that the Lord God ordained priests, after his Holy Order, which was after the order of his Son, to teach these things unto the people. And those priests were ordained after the order of his Son, in a manner that thereby the people might know in what manner to look forward to his Son for redemption. And this is the manner after which they were ordained—being called and prepared from the foundation of the world... (vs. 1-3).

Did you get that? We're talking about priests. His Son, His Son His Son. So you can understand who His Son is, there are going to be some people who qualified—before the foundation of the world—that will be qualified to come and teach about some things. And they're going to be called before the foundation of the world, like His Son was called before the foundation of the world, to be pointing to His Son who will come into the world, And this qualification occurs before the world is. But it is done so you can understand and have faith in His Son.

Being called and prepared from the foundation of the world according to the foreknowledge of God (vs. 3).

Why does God have foreknowledge about these things? Why does God know that, given the trust, they will be true to it? Why does God know that these are the kinds of people to whom trust can be given, and it will not be broken? Why does God have such foreknowledge? It's not based upon conjecture. It's based upon proof. It's not based upon merely hope. It's based upon the knowledge of God. Because He's not asking lead to do what He knows only iron can accomplish. Therefore, he chooses a suitable instrument based upon His foreknowledge, prepared from the foundation of the world. And what is God's foreknowledge known?

...on account of their exceeding faith and good works, in the first place. That is, before the foundation of this world; [in the first place, long ago, on some other rung of this ladder—long ago, a great while in the past. In the first place, they were] left to choose good or evil; therefore they having chosen good, and exercising exceedingly great faith, are called with a holy calling, yea, with that holy calling which was prepared with, and according to, a preparatory redemption for such (vs. 3).

You have to redeem them, in order to have them reclaimed, so that they can come back and perform what they need to do. There has been a preparatory redemption. They have chosen what's right. And the game's afoot, and you're in it. And you're here, and this is now. And you have the opportunity, on account of your own being left to choose between good and evil, having the opportunity to choose good. And at this moment, you have the

opportunity to exercise “exceedingly faith.” And you have the opportunity, at this moment, to be identified and proven by God, so that his foreknowledge of you hereafter includes within it a record of your exceeding faith and good works.

And thus they have been called to this holy calling on account of their faith, while others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and [the] blindness of their minds, while, if it had not been for this they might have had as great [a] privilege as their brethren (vs. 4).

Resist it, if you want; reject it, if you want. But you can read right here what the consequences are. Others would reject the Spirit of God on account of the hardness of their hearts and the blindness of their minds. If it had not been for this, they might have had as great a privilege as their brethren.

Or in fine, in the first place they were on the same standing with their brethren [that is, before they ever got here, in the first place, long ago, far away, they were on the same standing with their brethren; exactly the same place]....this holy calling being prepared from the foundation of the world for such as would not harden their hearts, being in and through the atonement of the Only Begotten Son, who was prepared—And thus being called by this holy calling, and ordained unto the high priesthood of the holy order of God, to teach his commandments unto the children of men, that they also might enter into his rest—This high priesthood being after the order of his Son, which order was from the foundation of the world; or in other words, being without beginning of days or end of years, being prepared from eternity to all eternity, according to his foreknowledge of all things [it has been underway a long time; this has been underway a long time]—Now they were ordained after this manner—being called with a holy calling, and ordained with a holy ordinance, and taking upon them the high priesthood of the holy order, which calling, and ordinance, and high priesthood, is without beginning or end (vs. 5-8).

You say a man must be ordained by someone here, while in the flesh, and I say that may be true enough. But if he was not ordained before this, at some point in eternity—that is “without beginning”—then you might as well ordain a sack of flour. Because if it does not reckon from some place in eternity, it is inadequate to compensate or deal with eternal things. You say you want to create an expectation into the next life, and I say if it did not exist and the authority by which to declare it was not handed down from before in eternity, then it will not last after.

Joseph held up a ring and said, There is no beginning, and there is no end; it is one eternal round. I'm telling you, you're only on part of the cycle here. But you *are* on part of this endless cycle—here; now! Today matters a great deal. Therefore, what you do here matters, infinitely, eternally, everlastingly. It matters! You have your doubts; weigh them in the balance. The gospel is delicious. Get rid of that stale, wretched stuff that you consume, and go on to find the life and the light and the vigor contained in the words that we have in scripture. This stuff is delicious. If you will partake of it and prepare yourself, you can improve this estate in a way that will reflect credit in the next estate. Don't forfeit the opportunity.

Thus they become high priests forever...(vs. 9).

They become high priests forever. They had it before the foundation of the world. They come here; they have authority here; and that authority began there, and it will continue into the next life. Therefore, they can bless, and you are blessed indeed.

Thus they become high priests forever, after the order of the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, who is without beginning of days or end of years, who is full of grace, equity, and truth. And thus it is. Amen. Now, as I said concerning the holy order, or this high priesthood, there were many who were ordained and became high priests of God; and it was on account of their exceeding faith and repentance, and their righteousness before God, they choosing to repent and work righteousness rather than to perish; Therefore they were called after this holy order, and were sanctified, and their garments were washed white through the blood of the Lamb (vs. 9-11).

You say you want to be baptized and to be cleansed from all sin? I say, have at it! But in addition, this “prototype of the saved man” requires you do something, in addition. You may only achieve a limited amount of grace in this life, but that limited amount of grace you must hold fast to. You cannot receive more if you will not receive what is offered now. And if you will receive what is offered now, you will be added upon. The Lord Omnipotent who reigns, who was and is from all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay. Father is a tabernacle of spirit and glory. The Son descended to be among us, in a tabernacle of clay.

To the extent that you can receive our Lord—though He was here, like you are—the only way you could tell the difference was, he declared things that were filled with light. How is the Lord able to accomplish all that He did? Abraham 3:19, the Lord tells you. He says, “*I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all.*” Why is the Lord able to say that He is more intelligent than they all? Because our Lord went from grace to grace to the point in

which he *understood* all things, because he had *been through* all things. He had *descended below* all things. And he had *risen above* all things. Therefore, he *comprehends* all things. He is more intelligent than us all because he is more experienced than us all. He has arrived at a state in which he is worthy, holy, sanctified—having been left to choose between good and evil, he has chosen good.

He declared who he was when He introduced himself to the Nephites, and he said he suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning. From what beginning? For you, why can't that be a beginning that starts now? For you, why can you not, from this beginning at this moment in this place, go forward, saying that you will follow the will of the Father in all things, from this beginning. Why will you refuse to rise up and to receive grace for grace? This is how you worship, who you worship. Because He was the word of God, the embodiment of what the Father's will was. The Father declares what is true, and the Son does it. And thus the Son became the word of God—because he did what the Father bid him do. Would you be a son or daughter of God? Do what he bids you do. This is how the Son worshipped. This is what you must do if you will worship him also. "I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all."

"The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth" (D&C 93:36). The light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehends it not. Because in the darkness, there are things that are forgotten. But in the light, there are things that are exposed and seen. Light and truth. Because you see things as they really are. Because you judge things as they really are—not after the manner of men but according to the light that God shines upon it. So that you can see, and you can feel that the heart that is speaking to you is pure; that the words that are being spoken are given by the grace of God; that it doesn't matter how flawed a vessel the Lord chooses, He can cleanse any of you, every wit; that He has such power as that. So He can take what is broken and mend it, and He can take what is unclean, even scarlet in color, and make it white as snow—by His word, which is the word of the Father, because the two of them are one. And so comes this sobering verse; two verses, in D&C 130:18 & 19:

Whatever principle of intelligence [Remember, the glory of God is intelligence, or in other words, light and truth. So now you—whatever principle of intelligence] we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection. And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come.

How will you gain intelligence? How will you gain knowledge? It says right here you gain knowledge and you gain intelligence by your diligence and obedience. The words that are

spoken are intended to cause action. When that answer came to me in the barracks, if I had done nothing, my life would have continued as it began, and there would have been no difference the next day. And today, I would be in a far different place than I am at this moment.

Hearing without heed and diligence, obedience to the things that God asked you—I mean, what good does it do you to know more about the scriptures than another person if it does not affect your behavior? What good does your knowledge give you if your knowledge is not employed to bring you and others near you closer to the Lord? Knowledge can be used as a point of vanity. It can be used to make you seem bigger, better, brighter. It can be a point of pride. It is power. And wielded in the wrong hands, it abuses, it subjugates, it humiliates. The Lord is not like that. He lifts, He raises, He elevates, He endows you. He blesses your lives. If you will receive it and act upon it, if you will soften your heart, if you will allow his spirit to enter in, if you will receive the light that comes from Him, you will receive grace. And you will be more like Him. And you will be more gracious and patient with others. And you will view them in their fallen state, and you will hope for them better. And to the extent that you're able to do so, you will offer them better.

Knowledge saves a man; and in the world of spirits no man can be exalted but by knowledge. So it is with the principles of the gospel. You must begin with the first and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge, for if he does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity by some evil power in the other world, as evil spirits will have more knowledge, and consequently more power.

A man is saved no quicker than he gains knowledge, but knowledge requires you to act because it doesn't become part of you until you have lived it. Therefore, unless you are willing to live it, you can't receive it.

Our religion is centered in Christ; therefore, our religion is centered in intelligence. It is not enough to know what Christ knows. We must also be loving or charitable, as He is. He not only created this world, He also suffered to save it. Christ's suffering was redemptive. It lifted the creation, as a result of what He was able to do. And if you think about it in physical terms, if you're going to use a fulcrum to lift an object, it is necessary to put the fulcrum underneath the whole thing. You cannot lift unless you put the fulcrum beneath. Christ is, in effect, the fulcrum which lifted the entirety of creation. So, in lifting the entirety of the creation, it is necessary for you to appreciate the extent to which Christ is bonded to all of this. And therefore, to all of you.

Go to Doctrine and Covenants 88. This is a marvelous transcript. This is a description that you need to keep in mind when you are trying to understand who our Lord is. Beginning in verse six:

He 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; Which truth shineth. This is the light of Christ. As also he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. As also he is in the moon, and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made; As also the light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made; And the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand. And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things. Now, verily I say unto you, that through the redemption which is made for you is brought to pass the resurrection from the dead. And the spirit and the body are the soul of man. And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul. And the redemption of the soul is through him that quickeneth all things, in whose bosom it is decreed that the poor and the meek of the earth shall inherit it (vs. 6-17).

Between verse 6 and verse 13, rather like bookends, the connection of Christ to all things appears seven times. It appears at the beginning, and it appears again at the end. Christ is in all things. Everything that you are acquainted with in this creation is sustained by the light of Christ. He occupies, He brings the light into. He is more intelligent than it all. And He keeps its organization together by the light that emanates from Him. This is why it is possible for redemption to come through Him. Because when He descended below it all, including death, He has the power, then, to bring it all with Him back into life. He is the fulcrum. He is the one which must permeate all things, in order for Him to be able to lay hold upon all things. And in order to, therefore, to bring you back from the grave. Which means, at this very moment you are in contact with Him through His spirit. He is giving you the life which you are presently living.

He is not a distant God. He is an immediate and an intimate God. You say He knows your thoughts, and that is true enough! Because He is giving you the ability and the freedom to entertain the thoughts. Therefore, He knows how to judge you, because everything that you have done, you have done using the power and the light He lends to you. You have the

illusion of privacy. You have the actuality of agency. But that agency is being employed by you, using an instrumentality that belongs to Him.

And the scriptures make it abundantly apparent that is, in fact, the case. Mosiah 2:21, *"I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants."* Because the energy that is being used at present to power this life that you're living is borrowed from Him. It is His light; it is His truth; it is His intelligence. He is sustaining you from moment to moment.

Verse 25: *And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were created of the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you."*

So, this mortal frame—that you are walking about in, temporarily—belongs to Him, and ultimately, He is going to take it back and reduce it back to dust and reform it into something else and do something else with it. And someday, He will resurrect you. But when He does that, that's Him, also. Because it will be a long time before you attain to the resurrection of the dead. You are going to borrow this from Him for yet some time.

He knows what He is doing. He has descended below it all in order to acquire the capacity to lift it all. And the things He intends to lift back include all of you. He intends to save everything. And by saving everything, allow it to continue on in its course. Those who will receive less will continue on in a lesser course. Those who will receive more will continue on in a greater course. But all will continue on, freely using what God freely gives to both the righteous and the wicked. He makes the sun to shine on the righteous and the wicked. He makes the rain to fall on both the righteous and the wicked. And he does so while merely asking you to repent and turn to Him. He does not demand obedience. He offers you, if you will obey, grace for grace that you, too, might receive more of Him in you and that you might be better animated by a higher source than the one that animates you at the moment. No matter where you are situated, He continuously offers you more.

Everything that you hope to receive into the next life, even your expectations—all of that has to be obtained from God by covenant. I mentioned in answer to a question in Ephraim that the role of the woman was significant, even in the life of Christ. I mentioned that She anointed Him preliminary to His death and burial. One of the things that gave Him the expectation of coming forth out of the grave was the anointing that promised Him... —Why

do you think, in the temple, the rites include preserving some of the functions of the body? It's not to make you healthy, here and now. It's so you can lay claim on this as an expectation in the eternities. Because if you do not have the expectation conferred upon you by the Holy Spirit of Promise, you'll have to get that in some other cycle. Because the only thing you will be able to take with you into eternity, you obtain in this manner. Everything has to be obtained by a covenant.

When it comes to the subject of marriage (as if all I have said and all that is in scripture isn't clear enough), Revelation 19 has a description of the culmination of all the Lord's great work in this cycle of creation. This is talking about when it all wraps up. In the prophecy, God cannot think of anything better to put into the mouth of John, his Beloved, who wrote this prophecy, than the analogy of a marriage used here. Revelation 19, beginning at verse 6:

And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude [male and female], and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

Not only does he liken the final triumph of the Lord's atonement to a wedding feast, but it is, in fact, a wedding feast. For all those who come through the tribulation, male and female, in the image of God, He will put on for them a wedding banquet, because they are like Him. They will see as they are seen, because they are like Him.

Humility is absolutely required to progress. The more we think we understand, the less willing we can become to receive more. Joseph said, "It is the constitutional disposition of mankind to set up stakes and bounds to the works and ways of the Almighty" (TPJS, pg. 320). He also said, "I never heard of a man being damned for believing too much; but they are damned for unbelief" (TPJS, pg. 374). James 4:6 says, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." Damnation is limiting progress or stopping progress. Setting up boundaries to what the Lord can do is voluntary damnation. No matter how much you believe you know, if you will be humble, you will learn a great deal more. We must continue progression, or if we don't, we accept damnation and that, too, voluntarily.

Interesting comparisons can be made between the Hindu belief in “karma” and the Mormon teaching of “pre-existence.” Karma includes the belief that what was done (or not done)—both in this and previous states of existence—will determine a person’s condition now and in the future existence. Whatever blessings or burdens you encounter are of your own creation by your deeds. Your suffering is merited and deserved. But by doing well, acting justly, and showing kindness you can deserve to inherit a better existence in the next state.

Mormonism includes the declaration that what we experience now and in the future is based on our heed and diligence to the Gods’ pathway. While the Hindu karma has a robust body of teaching, Mormonism’s explanation of pre-earth events is spartan:

- The spirits of all mankind lived as separate personalities before birth.
- This world was planned before it was created, and people were assigned roles to fulfill in this creation.
- Some souls were more noble and great than others.
- Prophets were chosen to have a role to “rule” or to teach in this lifetime.
- Christ was chosen to be the Savior of mankind in the expected event they fell from grace and required saving.
- Lucifer rebelled and others followed him.
- All souls were free to make choices before coming to this stage of creation.

We can infer from these few, settled Mormon ideas that all our choices made before this creation mattered and affect us here and now. Likewise, all choices we make now will follow us into the hereafter and affect things there.

What’s the definition of a creation? How often in a creation does one appear? If you look carefully at the scriptures—the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, talking with Christ, are given a fulsome vision of everything that is now going to unfold on into the future. And these are the disciples—this is Peter, James, and John standing there on the Mount—they look at this, they look upon the long absence of their spirit from their bodies, and they regard it as a form of prison, and so they figure out an escape route. It’s in the scriptures. John says, Don’t send me there; let me stay in this arena and do battle here. Peter and James (it’s actually Jacob) say, Let us come speedily into your kingdom, (meaning: don’t leave us there; resurrect us). They will miss the resurrection because the first resurrection was when Christ came out of the grave, and they were going to die after that. Therefore, they were left there. They said, No, don’t leave us there, and so they secured an early resurrection; they’re not in the spirit world. If a long time in the spirit world is not part of the agenda, then they had no reason to take that up as an issue and

have that discussion with the Lord and make the choices they did. Therefore, if multiple mortalities is like: On Wednesday I die, and on Monday I'll be resurrected or reborn as someone else, then there is no long absence of the spirit from the body; there is a continual return. But then you get into the definition of creation and how many creations have there been for this world and topics about which even Joseph kept his mouth shut.

Early Christians were very diverse. There was no one in charge and no attempt to standardize Christianity. These earliest believers were divided into the following kinds of Christians:

- Pauline Christians: These believers were grounded in a tradition founded by the apostle Paul. They claimed to follow the Old Testament and Paul's instructions. They were located in the areas Paul served as a missionary. Paul appointed teachers who were charged with guarding the doctrine from being changed.
- Mathayan Christians: Followers of Matthew, centered in Antioch, who attempted to form a compromise between Jewish and non-Jewish—or Gentile—Christians. It was in Antioch that the conflicts in Jewish Christianity were worked out. You read of Mathayan Christianity in the book of Acts, where respect and loyalty to the Jewish temple at Jerusalem is acknowledged but Gentile converts were welcomed.
- Johannine Christians: These are followers of John. These believers tried to keep an original focus on the individual's relationship with Christ alive. They emphasized the in-dwelling of Christ's spirit in each Christian. They taught and believed in the pre-earth existence of man's spirits. Before the creation, Christ was the great high priest of heaven who would redeem the creation by His sacrifice. The strength of their teaching was focusing on the individual's relationship with Christ and no organization could replace that individual relationship.

The idea of the love of Christ was preserved in Johannine Christianity. Spirit, knowledge, and ritual were designed to preserve knowledge of Christ. Although lost to western Christianity, John taught that man would become divinitized, or ascend in stages of progression, to become just like God. His teachings have been lost, but two passages in the New Testament writings of John preserve that teaching still:

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope...purifieth himself, even as he is pure (1 John 3:1-3).

In Revelation 3, beginning in verse 20, it is Christ who is speaking: *“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”* (Revelation 3:20-22).

Almost all knowledge of the earliest forms of Christian practices have been erased by the destruction of records. John’s teaching of a pre-earth existence for the spirit of Christ and for all mankind did not suddenly disappear. It lingered for centuries.

Origen, an early Christian, claimed the original teachings of Christ included that Christ came into this world in possession of knowledge He held from before the creation of this world. Jesus had been so faithful to the Logos, or “word of the Father,” that He was entitled to that as His name. He exemplified the word of the Father. Do you want to know what the Father said? Look to Christ, because everything Christ did was an example of that word of the Father. Other spirits who were less faithful, and some of who fell away altogether, are involved also with this world.

Joseph Smith also testified that we all existed as spirits living before the creation of this world, and I believe this is a teaching. Each human soul is at a different point of progression and therefore, has different abilities to perceive the truth here. Every person in the world has a distinct spiritual past that began long before the creation of this world. Salvation consists of doing what is necessary in this world to advance individual spirit progression. The greatest way to progress is to follow Christ.

Joseph Smith, like the apostle John, believed and taught that all of us existed as spirits before the creation of the world. We are spirit-beings having an earthly experience. There’s a veil of forgetfulness, because as physical beings, our thoughts are processed through a physical biomechanical connection limiting our pre-earth memory. This limit is an important part of God’s plan. If we had a perfect memory of our pre-earth existence, we would not be required to develop faith in Christ. But our spirits know God, and in our quiet moments we all sense our immortality. We are here to be tested, and the test is now underway.

I don’t believe that anyone comes back here to live a second mortal experience in this creation. I do think that when the scriptures use the phrase *worlds without end*, the work of God is infinite in scope and reach and that God’s redemptive work is, in each individual case, adapted to the development of the individual until they grow and are fashioned and are developed to the appropriate godly stature that we become like our Lord. Christ went,

and He preached to the spirits in prison, meaning that when He died and He went into the place where the dead are, He continued His ministry. Peter writes about that. The continuation of a ministry among the dead suggests that when you die, there's still work to be done—at least preaching to be done. If you read real carefully some of the content about the things that occurred before the world and the things that will occur at the end of the thousand years of peace when Lucifer (Satan) is released—at the end of the thousand years of peace, the very, very beginning of what went on before the world was created and the very, very end when, after a thousand years of peace, Satan is loosed from the pit again, look an awful lot alike. But that's a subject beyond the challenges and the problems of this mortal life and what we today confront and are faced. There's a lot of stuff in the far distance that aren't relevant for the challenges we face now. In fact, we were just looking at that phrase *worlds without end*, which is how it's rendered. The original language, if you take it literally, meant: As you look out at the horizon, it's something past your ability to see. It's beyond the end of the world as you see it, meaning that what comes after we finish our sojourn here will be trouble for another day, because sufficient is the evil of this day for the purposes God has in mind for us and our challenges here.

I would like to suggest that the Holy Order after the Order of the Son of God includes the fact that those who inherit the Holy Order are sons of God. Therefore, in a way, calling it the Holy Order after the Order of the Son of God is a way of identifying the recipient as someone who has become one of God's sons. I think it's appropriate to regard the primary identifier—that is, the subject of who the Son of God is—to be Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. Because quite frankly, He's the only one who attained to the resurrection, and it is through the power of the resurrection that we're going to come forth. We do not have the power in ourselves to rise from the dead. The wages of sin are death; we've earned those wages; we all will die. The Savior did not earn those wages. He died, and therefore, His death was unjust, and the law of justice got broken when He died. Therefore, whenever justice makes a claim on any of us, He can point to the fact that justice extracted from Him eternal life and that is an infinite price for Him to have paid. Therefore, He has compensated for all of mankind's shortcomings [and] failures.

Christ is the means by which we lay hold upon the promises, but it is His intention to make of us all sons of God. Therefore, the Holy Order after the Son of God is when the name is announced, self-identifying the person holding such a Holy Order as one of God's sons, even though they may be mortal, even though they may be in the flesh. The Holy Order is for that very purpose and is after the Order of the Son of God. "All other priesthoods are only parts, ramifications, powers and blessings belonging to the same, and are held, controlled, and directed by it. It is the channel through which the Almighty commenced revealing His glory at the beginning of the creation of this earth, and through which He has continued to reveal

Himself to the children of men to the present time, and through which He will make known His purposes to the end of time” (History of the Church, 4:207).

Therefore, among other things, the purpose of the Holy Order is to put in place a mechanism by which God can reveal from heaven what is necessary for the salvation of man on earth, in every generation, in order to fix what is broken; in order to restore what has been lost; in order to repair, heal, forgive, and reconnect those who are willing to give heed to the message sent from heaven, so that they can rise up to become sons of God.

If Christ attained to the resurrection through His progression from one small capacity to a great one, going from grace to grace and from exaltation to exaltation, did His Mother do anything less? Was Her coming into this world any less of a condescension? Reflect on the Mother of God, and consider this passage of Lecture Seventh, which describes Christ.

And if we should continue our interrogation, and ask how it is that he is saved, the answer would be, because he is a just and holy being. And if he were anything different from what he is he would not be saved, for his salvation depends on his being precisely what he is and nothing else. For if it were possible for Him to change in the least degree, so sure would he fail of salvation and lose all his dominion, power, authority and glory, which constitutes salvation. For salvation consists in the glory, authority, majesty, power and dominion which Jehovah possesses, and in nothing else, and no being can possess it but himself or one like him (Lectures on Faith 7:9).

It requires as much to save a woman as a man. No person, male or female, can dwell where God dwells without possessing the same attributes as all those who have gone before. The pattern is unchangeable. We cannot claim to be like Them without possessing the same holiness these holy beings possess.

Returning to the words of the Divine Mother in Proverbs 8: *“I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment: That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures” (vs. 20-21).*

These treasures are not earthly, but “durable” and incapable of depreciation. What the Mother offers cannot be harmed by moth or rust, nor lost to thieves. They are in heaven. But obtaining them requires us to walk as She guides *“in the way or righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment.”* The great, white throne is not occupied by the Father alone. Nor will that great judgment be made without the Mother’s involvement, for She lives in *“the paths of judgment”* and wisely counsels Her children to obtain durable *“riches and honor”*.

The Mother explains how She was present from the beginning as part of the God we call the Father or, in Hebrew, the Elohim:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his Earth; and my delights were with the sons of men (Proverbs 8:22-31).

Before this creation, the Mother in Heaven was with the Father. She was beside Him when His work began. She was there when the plan was laid, the boundaries established, and the compass applied to establish order for the creation. All the Father knows, the Mother knows. All the Father established and ordered, the Mother established and ordered. They are One. She is the Father's "delight," and the potential of Her sons to be like Her Husband brings Her delight.

To be like their Father, Her sons must become one with Her daughters, for it is not good for man to be alone. The Father and Mother are One, and Her sons and daughters must likewise become one. Only when the man and woman were together was the creation "good." When men rebel, disobey, act cruelly, or mistreat Her daughters, we are anything but a "delight" to the Heavenly Mother. When we offend Her, we also offend Her Husband.

Before any of us will plan, measure, set a compass, and apportion the foundations of another earth, we must grow together and become like Them. Their work is glorious. They possess love—the power that creates and organizes. Love is the power behind all that They do. We cannot be like them without a loving relationship that mirrors Theirs.

Their character, perfections, and attributes are mercy, righteousness, love, compassion, and truthfulness. They are without partiality, no respecter of persons, regarding all alike. They make the sun to shine and the rain to fall on both the righteous and the wicked. They regard wickedness as an abomination. They prize truth, meekness, and peacemakers. They

abhor the froward, prideful, evil, and arrogant. They are full of grace and truth and are more intelligent than us all. They are the Creators and will be the final judges of this cycle of existence, and no one will be permitted to progress further without Their permission. There is nothing vile or perverse about Them. They are repelled by contention and seek for us all to associate with one another equally, as brothers and sisters. They are perfect, in the sense of having completed the journey to the end of the path and entered into Eternal Lives and Exaltation. They now seek to guide Their children along that same path.

First and foremost, for fallen man in this creation, salvation is dependent upon Jesus Christ. Like Christ, we are expected to grow from grace to grace. Those words are in a revelation that begins with this promise: *“Verily, thus saith the Lord: It shall come to pass that 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). This is how we are to grow from grace to grace. This is how we can receive of His fullness. There is no mention of redirecting our obedience to another. Nor is there any name provided to us to call upon other than Christ’s. Nor is there any voice we are to hearken unto other than Christ’s. We are in a fallen state and need to be saved. Like Mary acknowledged to Elizabeth when they met, we need to be rescued by a Savior. That Savior is Jesus Christ. She pointed us to Him, and if we will heed Her wise counsel, we will rely on the merits of Christ, who is mighty to save.

Women should be regarded as daughters of the Divine Mother. Like Her, they carry the power to produce new life. Mothers are the physical veil between pre-earth spirits and physical bodies inhabited in mortality. They clothe children in the veil of flesh. This power to give life has been regarded in almost all societies as something sacred and holy. In our coarse and vulgar society we have rejected, as a matter of law, the idea that women engage in a sacred and holy labor when bearing children.

The Great Weaver organizes intelligence into life itself through motherhood. It is in the womb that disorganized intelligence is organized into spirits resembling the Heavenly Parents in eternity. Mothers in this creation do likewise. That power, endowed by the Divine pattern, is present in this creation to testify of She who wove our spirits before this world. She is ever providing wisdom to guide the energy of Her Divine counterpart so balance and order are maintained. For the present, it is enough to know She is there and that She urges us to be faithful and obedient to Her Son, our Redeemer and Savior. We need to be rescued from our fallen state. Jesus Christ is our rescuer.

Jesus Christ was among the *souls* who were *noble and great* before this cycle of creation. The word *soul*, as used in the 1842 publication of the book of Abraham, had been defined in

a revelation received in 1832: *“Now, verily I say unto you, that through the redemption which is made for you is brought to pass the resurrection from the dead. And the spirit and the body [is] the soul of man. And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul. And the redemption of the soul is through him who quickeneth all things, in whose bosom it is decreed that the poor and the meek of the Earth shall inherit it” (D&C 88:15).* Christ is identified in the scripture as a *soul* before this world was created. Therefore, before this world was created, Christ had both a *spirit and a body*—having gone through the necessary progression required for all who ascend to be *like unto God*.

The earliest dispensations had truth from heaven as their guide. Joseph began re-assembling what was lost but was slain before it was completed. We are the offspring of heaven and are capable of reuniting with heaven while mortal. We also have the opportunity, through eons of progression, to become as our Parents, the Gods. Now is the time to awaken, arise, and shake off the dust. This world is a place of trial and testing. Before creation, it was planned that when we came here, we would be *proven* by what we experience. That happens now. Prove yourself by listening to God, hearing His voice, and obeying. Sometimes we are like Alma and want to do greater things to help God’s work, but the greatest work of all is to respond to God’s voice and prove you are willing to listen and obey Him.

The foregoing are excerpts taken from:

- Denver’s *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #7 entitled “Christ, Prototype of the Saved Man,” given in Ephraim, UT on June 28, 2014;
- Denver’s *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #9 entitled “Marriage and Family,” given in St. George, UT on July 26th, 2014;
- Denver’s conference talk entitled “Things to Keep Us Awake at Night,” given in St. George, UT on March 19th, 2017;
- Denver’s talk entitled “Other Sheep Indeed,” given at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, UT on July 29th, 2017;
- Denver’s *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #2, given in Dallas, TX on October 19th, 2017;
- Denver’s *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #3, given in Atlanta, Georgia on November 16, 2017;
- Denver’s fireside talk entitled “The Holy Order,” given in Bountiful, UT on October 29, 2017;

- Denver's conference talk entitled "Our Divine Parents," given in Gilbert, AZ on March 25th, 2018;
- The presentation of Denver's paper entitled "The Restoration's Shattered Promises and Great Hope," given at the Sunstone Symposium in Salt Lake City, UT on July 28, 2018; and
- Denver's remarks given at the "Remembering the Covenants" Conference in Centerville, UT on August 4, 2018.