



Five Foundations Of The Restoration

By Armon Eaton · April 2020

In May of 1844, the prophet Joseph Smith declared, “*I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world.*”¹ Now, you don’t revolutionize the whole world by incrementally tinkering around with reforming the false religious doctrines then known to the world in Joseph’s day. Revolution means an outright repudiation of the creeds and doctrines of the Great Apostasy mentioned in Joseph Smith’s first vision. As President Brigham Young would later say:

*“We will turn the world right side up, for it is now wrong side up, and we want to turn it over, prepare it, and present it to Him who owns it, in a more goodly form and attitude than it has been for many centuries.”*²

In what ways did Joseph Smith lay a foundation for turning the world right side up?

Consider the following 5 foundations of The Restoration that we will discuss in more detail:

- (1) RESTORATION OF REALITY (Eternal Laws)
- (2) RESTORATION OF REASON (Eternal Truths)
- (3) RESTORATION OF VALUE MORALITY (Eternal Lives)
- (4) RESTORATION OF JUSTICE (Eternal Kingdoms)
- (5) RESTORATION OF GLORY (Eternal Creations)

(1) RESTORATION OF REALITY (Eternal Laws)

There are false religious doctrines and philosophies that proclaim there is no such thing as an objective reality. These false religious philosophies claim that the ultimate consciousness (God) is outside of reality and that He created reality with its observable laws “out of nothing” (*ex nihilo*). In this regard Joseph Smith said:

*“You ask the learned doctors why they say the world was made out of nothing, and they will answer, ‘Doesn’t the Bible say he created the world?’ And they infer, from the word create, that it must have been made out of nothing. Now, the word create came from the word baurau, which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory. Element had an existence from the time He had. The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning and can have no end.”*³

The First Vision turned centuries of false doctrine on its head in a single instant by demonstrating that God is not some “floating abstraction” outside of reality, but instead is a real person, occupying real space, with a real body, parts, and passions. Furthermore, by proclaiming that the base element (chaotic matter) is also eternal, Joseph changed the entire perspective of God’s relationship to reality. The God of Joseph Smith’s first vision is a God who exists within reality, and

consequently is the ultimate obeyer of the laws of reality. The God of the apostasy, however, is based on God being a law unto himself. Elder Bruce R. McConkie described this God of the apostasy:

*"The Christian heresy, where God is concerned, is that Deity is a spirit essence that fills the immensity of space; that he is three beings in one; that he is uncreated, incorporeal, and incomprehensible; that he is without body, parts, or passions; that he is a spirit nothingness that is everywhere and nowhere in particular present. These are concepts written in the creeds had in the churches of the world."*⁴

Elder McConkie contrasted the God of the Apostasy with the God of the Restoration:

*"The truth pertaining to Him is that he is our Father in heaven, that he has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's, that he is a literal person..."*⁵

The God of the First Vision is plainly manifested as existing within reality, and subject to eternal laws independent of Himself. The First Vision clearly gives primacy to existence (reality), not consciousness. President John Taylor said:

*"Permit me to say there are eternal laws that exist with the Gods in the eternal worlds, and from which they cannot depart, and to which they are bound in all their acts ... All beings, all things, from the Great Creator to the minutest form of life are governed by the law of their existence."*⁶

It took a personal visit from God to show Joseph Smith the correct nature of God as being an exalted man. This is what Joseph Smith called "the great secret" of the Restoration.

*"There are but a very few beings in the world who understand rightly the character of God ... God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by His power, was to make himself visible - I say, if you were to see him today, you would see him like a man in form - like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man... I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see."*⁷

Lorenzo Snow said it concisely this way: "As man now is, God once was; As God now is, man may be."⁸

If God was once like us, that must necessarily mean that reality exists independent of Him, and the same eternal laws that allowed Him to become exalted, may also exalt us. Elder John A. Widtsoe said:

*"Joseph Smith ... departed from the notion that God is a Being foreign to nature and wholly superior to it. Instead, he taught that God is part of nature, and superior to it only in the sense that the electrician is superior to the current that is transmitted along the wire. The great laws of nature are immutable, and even God cannot transcend them."*⁹

The truth that God didn't create reality with its eternal laws, but is instead the great obeyer of eternal laws, revolutionizes everything. The First Vision, describing the true nature of God as an exalted man who exists within reality, leads to our next takeaway...

(2) RESTORATION OF REASON (Eternal Truths)

What does the First Vision and the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ have to do with reason?

In the 1832 First Vision account, Joseph Smith wrote:

*"At about the age of twelve years, my mind become seriously impressed with regard to the all-important concerns for the welfare of my immortal soul ... Thus, from the age of twelve years to fifteen I pondered..."*¹⁰

What is pondering? Pondering implies "a definite focusing of one's thoughts on something, so as to understand it deeply."¹¹ The prophet Joseph Smith is a wonderful example of the pattern of lifelong learning through pondering and applying his mind to great questions. Joseph pondered the purpose of our mortal existence and claimed by "the voice of reason, the language of inspiration ..." that "this life is not all."¹²

President Brigham Young later agreed with Joseph in describing the role of reason and the human mind in gaining a testimony of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ.

*"yet there are reasons for all this, and that that we may call eternal philosophy, God's philosophy, the philosophy of angels - natural philosophy, reasonable philosophy, ... commends itself to the human mind, to the intelligence that man possesses..."*¹³ *"I am a witness that 'Mormonism' is true upon philosophical principles. Every particle of sense I have, proves it to be sound natural reason."*¹⁴

President John Taylor also agreed with applying our minds to proving all principles:

*"And I may also say that there has never been a principle revealed but what has been strictly philosophical and is in accordance with good, sound common sense; and, furthermore, I will go on beyond that and say that no principle ever will be revealed but what will be in accordance with philosophy, if we can comprehend it."*¹⁵ *"I used to be told when investigating religious principles that it was dangerous to do so, and I had better let them alone; but I did not think so. I*

*believe it is good to investigate and prove all principles that come before me. Prove all things, hold fast that which is good, and reject that which is evil, no matter what guise it may come in. I think if we, as 'Mormons,' hold principles that cannot be sustained by the Scriptures and by good sound reason and philosophy, the quicker we part with them the better, no matter who believes in them or who does not."*¹⁶

What is so important about pondering? Do you think the First Vision and the subsequent Restoration would have come about if Joseph had *not* pondered and applied his reason to all the religious contradictions he observed? Consider the example recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, describing Oliver Cowdery's failed attempt to translate parts of the Book of Mormon. One may ask what was Oliver's mistake that caused the Lord to remove the opportunity for Oliver to attempt to translate?

D&C 9:8-9: *"But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong;"*

Oliver's failure to receive the inspiration required to translate was based on his lack of pondering and applying his mind, via reason, to the problem at hand. The Lord chastised Oliver in this regard when He said:

D&C 9:7 *"Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me."*

But didn't reason exist prior to the restoration? In the scientific arena yes, but in the religious arena the Great Apostasy had long since done away with reason and replaced reason with contradictory doctrines requiring a mystical, blind faith, in an incomprehensible God. For example, in order to promote his version of the false religious ideals of his day, Martin Luther proclaimed:

*"It is impossible to harmonize faith and reason ... You must abandon your reason, know nothing of it, annihilate it completely or you will never enter heaven ... You must leave reason to itself for it is the born enemy of faith ... There is nothing so contrary to faith as law and reason."*¹⁷

Modern evangelical doctrine continues this perspective opposite to the Restoration, by attacking reason and invalidating mankind's God given conceptual mental abilities with false religious statements such as:

*"The man of faith...ventures forth sometimes against all logic and reason out of fidelity to the inward call that comes to him from God...Faith must believe against human thought, feeling, and perception, since reason admits the validity only of that which can be perceived or conceived."*¹⁸

Elder Orson Pratt rejected this blind version of faith when he said: *"Faith or belief is the result of evidence presented to the mind. Without evidence, the mind cannot have faith in anything."*¹⁹

What is the problem with throwing out reason and replacing it with a blind, mystical faith? Elder Dallin H. Oaks cautioned that it can lead to deception and false revelation:

*"In the sequential relationship between reason and revelation, it is important that reason have what we can call 'the first word' and that revelation have 'the last word.' In this sequence, reason can 'study it out' and formulate a proposed solution. In addition, as we seek confirmation or other guidance from revelation, reason can serve as a threshold check to screen out revelation that is counterfeit and to provide a tentative authentication of revelation that is genuine. This is necessary because, just as there is reasoning that is faulty, so also there is revelation that is spurious. In an important teaching about spiritual gifts, the early members of the restored church were cautioned to beware lest they be deceived."*²⁰

Pondering assumes thinking *about something* external to our own consciousness, by paying attention to evidence via reason. If our conclusions as an end result of our reasoning correspond to the way things are in reality, then we call that truth. The Lord Himself gave us His definition of truth in D&C 93:24: *"And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come"*... which leads to the next takeaway from the First Vision...

(3) RESTORATION OF VALUE MORALITY (Eternal Lives)

God Himself described the eternal nature of mankind when He revealed His own mission statement to Moses:

*"For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man."*²¹

The objective of the First Vision, and the subsequent Restoration, is an extension of God's own stated purpose. The eternal life of each individual, then, is the universal standard of morally correct desires and actions. Consequently, we ought to desire what is good for our life, not just in the short term, but in the long term. Knowing good from evil and implementing the good is crucial in our quest for eternal life. Good means we accurately VALUE facts of reality relative to how it affects our ETERNAL LIFE. Evil is any action that undermines our eternal life as the ultimate value. All other values flow from the foundational value of eternal life.

The end purpose of any life is HAPPINESS. The progression of man's divine nature to become like God, is directed toward improving our ability to THINK, improving our power to ACT, and improving our CAPACITY to enjoy. In other words, any knowledge of what is good for us is then directed towards righteous actions involving values that lead to our happiness. Christ described this relationship between truth, happiness, and actions when he said: *"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."*²²

So, instead of God's commandments being a blind duty for us to obey (whether we like it or not), the Restoration proclaims that the commandments are God's way of helping us be happy. Obeying commandments makes us happy by helping us avoid common pitfalls in reality which are destructive to our life. In this regard, Joseph Smith explained:

*"And as God has designed our happiness—and the happiness of all His creatures, he never has—He never will institute an ordinance or give a commandment to His people that is not calculated in its nature to promote that happiness which He has designed, and which will not end in the greatest amount of good and glory to those who become the recipients of his law and ordinances."*²³

Elder Boyd K. Packer described how God's commandments are not arbitrary, made up inventions, meant to control us, but are instead warnings about laws inherent in reality.

*"He [God] does not have to be spiteful or vengeful in order that punishment will come from the breaking of the moral code. The laws are established of themselves."*²⁴

Which leads to our next takeaway...God governs His creations based on laws that are co-eternal with Him...

(4) RESTORATION OF JUSTICE (Eternal Kingdoms)

From Joseph Smith's First Vision in the spring of 1820, we learn of God's power over evil. Joseph Smith described how he went to the woods near his home to be alone and pray, but was then initially attacked and overcome by an evil power:

*"...I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction."*²⁵

Joseph Smith described how he was delivered from this evil power that bound him:

*"But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!"*²⁶

Darkness and evil were not new phenomenon in the world at the time of Joseph Smith. The same evil power that attacked the young Joseph Smith had been influencing the world to operate with the same darkness and injustice for centuries. President John Taylor said:

*"Read the history of nations and examine the paintings they have in their National Galleries, and you will find they represent, almost exclusively, scenes of blood, deadly struggles, triumphant victories, or sanguinary battles, and the groaning, troubles, sighs, sufferings, and death of the human family."*²⁷

The First Vision account clearly describes how God's Kingdom has power over evil. Although young Joseph didn't know it at the time, in coming years the priesthood government of God would again be restored to mankind. The Restoration proclaims that God's priesthood government ultimately is the only institution capable of ensuring universal justice.

President Brigham Young described the unique role of God's priesthood government when he said:

*"The Priesthood of the Son of God, which we have in our midst, is a perfect order and system of government, and this alone can deliver the human family from all the evils which now afflict its members and insure them happiness and felicity hereafter."*²⁸

Which leads to our final takeaway... A crown of glory (not a crown of thorns) awaits those who achieve eternal life.

(5) RESTORATION OF GLORY (Eternal Creations)

For centuries, the doctrines of the apostasy taught the depraved nature of mankind. John Calvin described the false doctrine of original sin when he said:

*"Original sin, therefore, appears to be a hereditary, depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused through all the parts of the soul, rendering us obnoxious to the divine wrath and producing in us those works which the scripture calls 'works of the flesh'."*²⁹

The philosopher Immanuel Kant said:

*"Out of wood so crooked and perverse as that which man is made of, nothing absolutely straight can ever be wrought."*³⁰

These statements stand in direct opposition to the potential glorious nature of mankind revealed to Joseph Smith. Joseph mentions the glory of the two personages who visited him, whose *"brightness and glory defy all description..."*³¹ In a later revelation, Joseph recorded the words God spoke to Moses where God said *"thou art my son"*.³² This doctrine of mankind as children of divine, Godly parentage was repeated by many of Joseph Smith's successors. President Brigham Young said:

*"God has made His children like Himself to stand erect, and has endowed them with intelligence and power and dominion over all His works, and given them the same attributes which He himself possesses."*³³

President Wilford Woodruff said:

*"We are his children, he wishes to exalt us back to his presence, and he knows very well we are obliged to walk in the same path and receive the same ordinances in order to inherit the same glory that surrounds him. And when we erect Temples in which to perform ordinances for the living and the dead, we do it to benefit our own blessed selves."*³⁴

The First Presidency issued a statement saying:

*"The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, basing its belief on divine revelation, ancient and modern, proclaim man to be the direct and lineal offspring of Deity. God Himself is an exalted man, perfected, enthroned, and supreme."*³⁵

Joseph Smith described how this understanding of our relationship with God enables the dispensing of divine knowledge:

*"The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with Himself, so that they might have one glory upon another, and all that knowledge, power, glory, and intelligence, which is requisite in order to save them in the world of spirits. ... Having a knowledge of God, we begin to know how to approach Him, and how to ask so as to receive an answer. When we understand the character of God, and know how to come to Him, he begins to unfold the heavens to us, and to tell us all about it. When we are ready to come to him, he is ready to come to us."*³⁶

This belief in the divine nature of mankind leads to a major difference between the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and historical Christianity. The Restoration believes in degrees of glory, not degrees of damnation. Elder John A. Widtsoe taught:

*"In the Great Plan there is no provision for the eternal damnation of man. At the best, men will be ranged according to their stage of progression—some higher, some lower. In a universe ruled by intelligent beings, filled with love for each other, there can be no thought of an endless damnation only as men, by opposition to law, destroy themselves. ... Those who refuse to accept truth or to abide by law, will gradually take less and less part in the work of progression. They will be left behind, while their intelligent fellows, more obedient, will go on. In nature there is no standing still; those who do not advance, will retrograde, become weaker and finally wither, and be forgotten in their low estate."*³⁷

Turning the world right-side up is a dangerous endeavor, inviting attack from those who don't welcome revolutions. In the end, Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were martyred for their mortal work of "revolutionizing the whole world". The book of Doctrine and Covenants makes no pretense of false altruistic motives on the part of Joseph and Hyrum Smith in announcing their martyrdom. It says: "They lived for Glory; They died for Glory; And Glory is their eternal reward."³⁸

ETERNALISM

President John Taylor first hinted at the term Eternalism as a distinct philosophical system when he said:

*"We are acting in all things with reference to eternity."*³⁹ *"We believe in eternal principles, in an eternal Gospel, an eternal Priesthood, in eternal communications and associations. Everything associated with the Gospel that we believe in is eternal."*⁴⁰

Elder B. H. Roberts first used the term Eternalism when he said:

*"Eternalism is the term I would select as the best descriptive word for New Dispensation philosophy; for that term best represents its concepts: an eternal universe, with no beginning and no end; eternal intelligence, working in eternal duration, without beginning or ending, and without ultimates. And hence eternal progression running parallel with eternal lives; and an eternal or 'everlasting gospel,' offering eternal opportunities for righteousness; eternal existence of mercy, justice, wisdom, truth and love; all accompanied by eternal relations, associations, unions, eternal youth and eternal glory!"*⁴¹

Elder John A. Widtsoe concurred with this designation of Eternalism as an appropriate name for this New Dispensation philosophy when he said: *"The Gospel may be said to be 'The philosophy of Eternalism.' The Gospel is immersed in the ocean of eternity."*⁴²

Elder Neal A. Maxwell also described the term when he said:

*"For the purpose of this brief discussion, Eternalism is defined as that view of man and the universe which not only acknowledges, but exults in, the existence of a Heavenly Father...Eternalism focuses on the individual and on those processes in which the individual is taught correct principles and then is given optimum opportunity to govern himself... For those who believe we are all going to be around forever, it is both natural and wise to concern ourselves with such questions and also with such principles which are also going to be around forever."*⁴³

These quotes involving the word "Eternalism", seem to indicate a deeper philosophical foundation underlying everything about the restored gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed to Joseph Smith. The five "E's" of the Restoration (Eternal Laws, Eternal Truths, Eternal Lives, Eternal Kingdoms, Eternal Creations) represent what we call the "five philosophical branches of Eternalism". Everything we know about anything, fits into one of these branches which when taken as a whole, represent a consistent, systematic, philosophical structure.

In theological language:

(1) Eternal laws give rise to (2) eternal truths which make possible (3) eternal lives within the dominion of (4) eternal kingdoms, amidst the glory of (5) eternal creations which are organized in accordance with (1) eternal laws which give rise to ... and so on, ad infinitum.

In philosophical language:

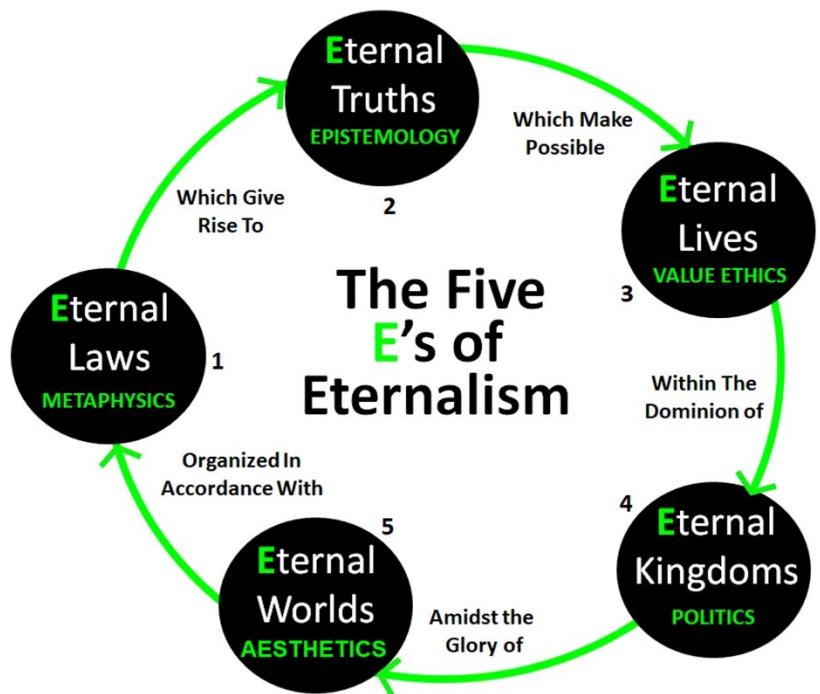
Eternal Laws = Eternalism's metaphysics which deal with the nature of existence. Metaphysics are the "self-existing facts" of reality. Metaphysics asks the question: **What is real?**

Eternal Truths = Eternalism's epistemology which deal with knowledge or the "discovered facts" of reality. Epistemology asks the question: **What is true?**

Eternal Lives = Eternalism's ethics which deal with desires, values, actions, or the "pursued facts" of reality. Ethics asks the question: **What is good?**

Eternal Kingdoms = Eternalism's politics which deal with governing, justice or the "protected facts" of reality. Politics asks the question: **What is just?**

Eternal Creations = Eternalism's aesthetics which deal with beauty, creating, or the "celebrated facts" of reality. Aesthetics asks the question: **What is beautiful?**



Why bother to think systematically and in principles? The objectivist philosopher Leonard Peikoff correctly said:

*"One must know the idea's relationship to all the other ideas that give it context, definition, application, proof. One must know all this not as a theoretical end in itself, but for practical purposes; one must know it to be able to rely on an idea, to make rational use of it, and ultimately, to live."*⁴⁴

Speaking to the young men of the church, Elder Maxwell gave some summary advice applicable to us all:

*"I do not know what lies ahead of you young men, but my advice would be to fasten your seat belts and hold on firmly to your principles!"*⁴⁵

What does all of this mean for Latter-day Saints in a practical sense? The answer is we ought to become and remain defenders of the Restoration. All the knowledge we have been given means that much is required of us in defending truth. Christ's counsel to Joseph Smith and the early Latter-day Saints is still applicable to us today:

*"For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation."*⁴⁶

Note: Much of the content of this article comes from the author's book "Christian Eternalism". To learn more about the philosophy of Eternalism, visit: www.ChristianEternalism.org

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