

the very letters on the page are but slightly conventionalized forms of the original symbols in which the message was conveyed,” thus these writings “are the nearest approach and the best clue thus far discovered to the genesis of the written word.”<sup>7</sup>

Despite the crucial role of the written word in conveying knowledge of God, Brigham Young was emphatic that: “Language to convey all the truth, does not exist. Even in the Bible, and all books that have been revealed from heaven unto men, the language fails to convey all the truth as it is.”<sup>8</sup> That is because an understanding of truth, especially spiritual truth, does not come through language itself, but through a process of revelation. After having been filled with the Holy Ghost following his baptism, Joseph Smith wrote: “Our minds being now enlightened, we began to have the scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of.”<sup>9</sup> He also said that: “. . .we never can comprehend the things of God and of heaven, but by revelation. We may spiritualize and express opinions to all eternity; but that is no authority.”<sup>10</sup>

The Prophet taught that gospel ordinances were given for the express purpose of giving us a direct experience of spiritual matters:

Could we read and comprehend all that has been written from the days of Adam, on the relation of man to God and angels in a future state, we should know very little about it. Reading the experience of others, or the revelation given to them, can never give us a comprehensive view of our condition and true relation to God. Knowledge of these things can only be obtained by experience through the ordinances of God set forth for that purpose. Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject.<sup>11</sup>

Oliver Cowdery observed that “one touch with the finger of his love, yes, one ray of glory from the upper world, or one word from the mouth of the Saviour, from the bosom of eternity, strikes [fiction and falsehood] into insignificance and blots it forever from the mind!”<sup>12</sup>

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7 *Ibid.*, p. 122.

8 B. Young, *27 February 1853*, p. 117.

9 JS-H 1:74.

10 J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 8 April 1843, p. 292. Thus Underwood’s comment that scripture “should become a ‘gateway’ to God rather than an idol that replaces him” (G. Underwood, *Revelation*, p. 81).

11 J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 9 October 1843, p. 324; cf. 8 April 1843, p. 292.

12 O. Cowdery, *Phelps*, p. 16.