

The Vanity of the World

By Jared Eastley

3/26/2023 V2

Arriving at a mature and informed understanding of gospel vocabulary seems to be the most valuable commodity that most people lack. A developed vocabulary informs our conceptions of words and philosophical concepts. But too often, we think we understand the word of the Lord and the vocabulary of the prophets, but in reality, our conception of their words is so overly simplistic, so underdeveloped, and so woefully ignorant, that we are not even aware of our own ignorance. And though ignorance is bliss, it is also exceedingly detrimental; and ignorance of ignorance is far, far worse; indeed, it is invariably catastrophic if it is not corrected.

The understanding of words requires context. Understanding context requires a deep study of etymology and history. It requires extensive work in cross-referencing, indexing, and studying the literary patterns employed by the prophets of God. And most of all, it requires revelation by and through the Spirit of God.

The power of the word is rooted in truth. And so, if we wish to understand God's words then we must be seekers of truth. This requires that we take great pains and expend great effort in researching and exploring the biblical context and usage of words.

One of God's favorite words is *vanity*. God often uses the word *vanity* to describe the ignorance, foolishness, and futility of man.

In the postscript of this essay, I shall briefly comment on several scriptures that talk about *vanity*, but first I would like to explore the meaning and application of the word *vanity* in our lives.

Vanity can be defined as missing the mark in judging, estimating, or calculating value, benefit, and outcome. *Vanity* is characterized by manifesting faulty judgement in the determination of good and evil, value, benefit, and outcome. *Vanity* is the inaccurate view of reality. When our beliefs and value judgements do not correctly reflect reality, we do vain things that do not lead to the best benefit or the most favorable outcomes.

Vanity is the precursor to sin. As we ignorantly and unwisely judge the value of our choices, we tend to choose sin.

An inaccurate view of reality leads to sin. We sin when we choose that which offers less value, less benefit, and a less desirable outcome. We typically do this because we are selfish, short-sighted, foolish, and ignorant.

The antidote to sin is truth.

The inaccurate view of reality is the result of lacking perfect truth.

God is the only one who possesses perfect truth. Perfect truth is all-inclusive, interconnected, infinite, and eternal. Without the guidance or comprehension, attainment, and application of perfect truth, vanity and sin are the inevitable results. And so, in the absence of perfect truth, we must become perfectly guided by the Spirit of God, and aligned with the will of God, trusting in his perfection, if we are to avoid vanity and sin.

As we become increasingly connected with the mind of God, submitting to his mind and will, melding our minds with his, we can avoid vanity and sin, and by so doing, arrive at the attainment of that which has the most value, the best benefit, and most desirable outcome. This is the purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Vanity is a very deep and broad concept. The definitions of vanity are vast and far-reaching. Understanding these definitions brings great benefit. The definitions I will list may seem repetitive and redundant, but the singularities are very important.

Definitions of Vanity

1. When we judge something that is good, or of greater value, to be evil, or of lesser value.
2. When we judge something that is evil, or of lesser value, to be good, or of greater value.
3. Ineffectual beliefs that are not based on reality.

That which is untrue, false, deceptive, illusionary, or bogus.

4. Beliefs and actions that prove to be futile, useless, pointless, worthless, impotent, powerless, and ineffective, because they are not based on reality and truth.
5. A pursuit that does not lead to improvement, benefit, or the best outcome.
6. That which will not satisfy our needs, appetites, or desires.
Empty pleasure. Vain pursuit. A useless and futile desire or endeavor.
Doing something without receiving the hoped-for results.
7. Doing things that cause vexation, frustration, and additional damage.
8. When we say someone has vanity, we are saying they are ostentatious, pretentious, arrogant, egocentric, boastful, conceited, prideful, displaying false dignity, false virtue, and pretending to offer value that is hollow and meaningless.

Again and again, the scriptures refer to the wisdom of the world as vanity. (See postscript) Indeed, for those who have eyes to see, it is readily apparent that most of the value and benefits offered by the world are manifestly bogus. The intellectual posturing of the world's greatest minds and leading institutions are invariably "ostentatious, pretentious, arrogant, egocentric, boastful, conceited, prideful, are displaying false dignity, false virtue, and are pretending to offer value that is hollow and meaningless." This condition is inevitable because the world does not have and does not embrace God's perfect truth.

Vanity is foolishness. Sin is foolishness. Assigning great value to that which is not good is foolishness.

Goodness can be defined as that which has the most value, the best benefit, and the most favorable outcome.

Virtue is that truth that leads us to do good. Virtue is the power of truth. God has power because he is filled with virtue. God's virtue makes him good.

It is given unto man to discern good from evil. Discernment of good and evil is a function of truth and faith. God offers us the truth and encourages us to exercise faith in doing good. As we grow in truth and virtue, our powers of discernment likewise increase.

Faith is a function of evidence, intelligence, and deliberative action. God offers us truth and goodness. He offers us evidence. He then invites us to see and comprehend his truth and goodness and to receive it by faith. We must have faith to receive of his goodness. Faith is deliberative action based on evidence.

The goodness of God is the opposite of vanity. God's goodness is received by assimilating light and truth, opening our eyes to an accurate view of reality, and then acting accordingly.

But this is not what the world does. Nephi rightly predicted that "the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge [Jesus] to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men."¹

I find it incredibly ironic how the world judges Jesus Christ "to be a thing of naught." That he who is called "the way, the truth, and the life,"² who "doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world,"³ should be judged as a thing of naught, is the ultimate tragedy. Similarly, that those who are sent to declare the truth and teachings of Jesus should be similarly reviled and rejected for their vanity is likewise tragic.

Jesus showed the perfect example by offering goodness and virtue, being accused of vanity, then humbly submitting to the will of the Father by suffering accordingly. His "loving kindness" was such that he offered goodness and virtue knowing that he would be condemned and suffer for it. Those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus are similarly persecuted and condemned. When we are persecuted for Jesus' sake, we are blessed for it, inasmuch as we suffer valiantly.

¹ Book of Mormon | 1 Nephi 19:9

² New Testament | John 14:6

³ Book of Mormon | 2 Nephi 26:24

We should be wise, receive of God's goodness, and not accuse those who promote God's goodness of having vanity. On this wise Nephi warned:

"Wo unto them that turn aside the just for a thing of naught and revile against that which is good, and say that it is of no worth! For the day shall come that the Lord God will speedily visit the inhabitants of the earth; and in that day that they are fully ripe in iniquity they shall perish."⁴

It is a very sad thing how, so often, the servants and messengers of God are reviled and judged for vanity. Why is this?

True servants and messengers of God are sent to channel the truth and intelligence of God from heaven to earth. The truth and intelligence of God does three things: it adds to what you know, it expands what you know, and it corrects what you think you know. This is not popular; it is scorned. And in many cases, it is angrily resented and hated.

Those who proclaim the truth of God are often not meek about it. This may not be intentional, but very often it is inevitable. God's messengers are imbued with power, confidence, and authority from God. Jesus spoke as one having authority. His disciples do likewise. Again, this is not popular; it is scorned. And in many cases, they are angrily resented and hated for it.

As you venture to stand for truth, in living and proclaiming the truth and virtue of God, be prepared to be accused of vanity.

There are so many who indicate that they really want truth, but their actions indicate they are only willing to receive said truth through the very narrowest window. Among many other constraints, it has to come in a way that makes them feel at least as good about themselves as they presently do. What a contradictory position.

Those who are called to disseminate truth will almost always cause feelings of diminishment. Truth received diminishes ego; truth rejected diminishes faith, hope, and charity, in the wake of an expanding ego. Receiving truth requires humility, but if we judge messengers of truth as purveyors of vanity, then we are as a man or woman dying of thirst, pouring the Waters of Life into the desert sand.

Personally, I would recommend great hesitancy and restraint in mentally or verbally accusing those who sincerely seek to teach the true doctrine of Christ as having vanity. The wise and the humble will meekly and humbly consider such teachings without accusing such messengers of vanity. If you have issues with their teachings, contest the teachings, but do not accuse would-be messengers of vanity. To do so is vanity. To do so is to judge wrongfully.

Remember that those who go public as teachers or messengers of God—especially no-name messengers and teachers, without institutional backing—these people are really sticking their necks out. They are selflessly rendering themselves very vulnerable to criticism, attack, institutional shunning, and persecution. This requires a lot of courage. These people should be honored and be treated with respect simply on the basis of their courage, integrity, and commitment to truth and virtue.

Before viewing yourself as capable of judging others correctly, first ask if you have ever done anything comparably courageous. If not, Jesus' instructions are applicable to you: don't judge another who you see doing better than you would do in their place. "Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?"⁵

If you really think someone's teachings are so vain and incorrect that they lack substance and value, then be so good as to offer them correction; but to accuse them of vanity is to reject and condemn whatever goodness and truth they offer. Rejecting goodness and truth is vanity.

In my case, I prefer to defer judgement on individuals who I find enigmatical. I prefer to assume the best about church leaders and public figures who seem to do and say things antithetical to the gospel of Jesus Christ, but who also seem to do some good. I do my best to leave judgement to God. For my part, I simply try to stand for that truth and virtue I am plainly aware of. What goes on in secret chambers, I do not profess to know.

Those who appear to lack humility and childlike meekness are often accused of vanity. This is often a mistake. Humility and meekness are virtues we are encouraged to manifest in relation to God, in acknowledging his infinite goodness

⁴ Book of Mormon | 2 Nephi 28:16

⁵ Matthew 7:4

compared with our finite and corruptible nothingness. Their deference is toward God, not man. Their love for God's goodness requires them to be bold against man's sin. Those with appropriate humility and meekness are very humble and open about their vulnerabilities, weaknesses, shortcomings, failings, and human inadequacies. But when it comes to standing for truth, teaching the truth, and declaring the virtue and goodness of God, such is not the time to vainly put on a display of meekness and humility just for the sake of not offending human sensibilities. True teachers and messengers of God will display courage, confidence, authority, and power. If this offends your pride, then this is your loss.

Many people tend to condemn vanity in those who appear to be holding themselves above others. In this context, vanity is not about value, reality, or truth, rather, it is about inequality. The proud cannot stand the idea of someone they consider to be somehow beneath them, or common, to possess truth greater than what they have.

Pride is essentially competitive in nature. The proud will reject teachers and messengers who challenge their sense of status and self-worth. When we condemn others who attempt to teach with power and confidence, we merely condemn ourselves by our petty display of self-righteous pride.

It is vanity that condemns those who preach repentance. It is vanity that condemns teachers and messengers of Christ. When we are “turned off” by those whom we view with vanity, we condemn ourselves by our vanity.

We would be wise to remember and accept that those who keep the commandments of God shall be made rulers and teachers over us. “And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments, thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy brethren.”⁶ When we reject those whom the Lord appoints as rulers and teachers over us, we also reject the Lord.

Let us not become as Laman, Lemuel, and the sons of Ishmael. “And Laman said unto Lemuel and also unto the sons of Ishmael: Behold, let us slay our father, and also our brother Nephi, who has taken it upon him to be our ruler and our teacher, who are his elder brethren. Now, he says that the Lord has talked with him, and also that angels have ministered unto him. But behold, we know that he lies unto us...”⁷

Nephi was rejected because he was an accuser. He expressed concern and great anxiety for the welfare of his brethren because of their unbelief, vanity, and obvious sins. To teach and preach repentance is the forbidden purview of the accuser. To warn and caution is the forbidden purview of the accuser. When we forbid those who teach and preach repentance, and who warn and caution where they see danger, we damn ourselves. Let us not be damned.

I love the story in the Book of Mormon of when Captain Moroni writes to Pahoran, who is the governor over the Nephites, censuring and rebuking him for withholding men and supplies needed for the armies of the Nephites to defend themselves against the armies of the Lamanites. As it turns out, Pahoran was innocent of any crime, but he was not angry at Captain Moroni for his accusations. Said he:

“And now, in your epistle you have censured me, but it mattereth not; I am not angry, but do rejoice in the greatness of your heart. I, Pahoran, do not seek for power, save only to retain my judgment-seat that I may preserve the rights and the liberty of my people. My soul standeth fast in that liberty in the which God hath made us free.”⁸

Pahoran was not worried about his ego or defending his image. His concern was for the welfare and liberty of his people. When Moroni made so bold as to rebuke him, he did not demote Moroni, instead, he praised him.

Do not decry the audacity of the accuser. Do not decry the vanity of the accuser. Rather, search your heart and humbly consider the possibility that maybe there is some cause for concern and some echo of truth in what the alleged accuser has to say.

Remember that all it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. And if we wait until we are perfect before we make a stand for truth and virtue then evil will assuredly triumph because of how few of us are perfect.

Oh, how Satan loves to see the would-be followers of Christ accusing one another of vanity, recoiling at those who preach repentance, and lashing out at those who raise the warning voice. What a sad fate this is.

I have warned before that those who reject no-name messengers will be likewise rejected by that God who sends them.

⁶ Book of Mormon | 1 Nephi 2:22

⁷ Book of Mormon | 1 Nephi 16:37 - 38

⁸ Book of Mormon | Alma 61:9

For my part, I have been censured for vanity because of my weakness in writing. Apparently, I sometimes come across as proud, high-minded, or as “the all-knowing sage dispensing guideposts to the uninitiated.” And so, I stand accused of an “element of vanity which is a big turnoff.”

I am very sorry for that, but in response, I would like to challenge anyone to do as I have thus far done, by publishing twenty-one chapters on gospel topics and twelve videos encouraging repentance, without somehow (in the eyes of others) manifesting an element of vanity which is a big turnoff. Anyone who makes a bold stand for truth and virtue, crying repentance, and attempting to confidently teach the doctrine of Christ—anyone who does this will inevitably be viewed as having vanity. This is sad, but what can I do?

“[Then] Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?”⁹

I am trying to follow the example of Jesus Christ. And so, I thank you if, in some very small way, you do to me what was before done to him. It is an honor I do not deserve.

We should all be seekers of light and truth. Hence, when God sends additional light and truth our way, we would be wise to humbly consider and internalize whatever truth they are sent to share. It is not for us to nit-pick their word choice, tone, appearance, apparent lack of humility, weakness in writing, display of vanity, or whatever other failings they might seem to have. We are to receive the messengers of the Lord with humility.

“And when I had said this, the Lord spake unto me, saying: Fools mock, but they shall mourn; and my grace is sufficient for the meek, that they shall take no advantage of your weakness; and if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them. Behold, I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness, and I will show unto them that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me the fountain of all righteousness.”¹⁰

We are to receive the word of God with charity, to include humility. We are to impart the word of God with faith, confidence, power, and with the Spirit of God. Those who are able to receive the word of God with faith, hope, and charity are empowered to drink from the fountain of all righteousness. This we do as we drink and are filled with the waters of life, even truth.

We should all be seekers of truth. The truth will make you free and the truth, if followed, will elevate and exalt you, enabling you to receive a fullness of joy.

We should be faithful in seeking, receiving, and sharing the truth of God.

Whatever truth you have, you should be diligent and fearless in sharing that truth as the Spirit of God directs.

The acquisition of truth is cyclical and reciprocal. As we give, even so, shall we receive.

May we all be filled with that faith, hope, and charity which allows us to both give and receive as the Lord sees fit.

As we seek and embrace all truth, conforming our minds and hearts with the reality of truth, we rid ourselves of vanity.

I testify of Christ. I testify that he is the way, the truth, and the life. I testify that he invites all to receive his light, his life, and his truth.

Thank you.

Scriptures and Commentary

*Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of **vanity**, and sin as it were with a cart rope. (Isaiah 5:18)*

Isaiah links vanity with sin and iniquity. Our disconnect with reality, believing that sin will bring happiness, is vanity. Such vanity inevitably leads to sin and iniquity .

⁹ John 10:32

¹⁰ Book of Mormon | Ether 12:26 - 28

*All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and **vanity**. (Isaiah 40:17)*

The world does not embrace the truth of God. Rather, the world embraces its' own knowledge and wisdom.

Those of the world are ignorant of reality. And so, in their ignorance and vanity, those of the world have been led to believe that good is evil and evil is good; or in other words, that there is value and happiness to be found in sin and that there is negative value and misery in doing good. What wretched vanity this is!

Because the nations of the world do not do justice and do not do good, but do injustice and evil, they are of negative benefit, and are counted to God as less than nothing, and vanity.

*None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: **they trust in vanity**, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. (Isaiah 59:4)*

When we trust in vanity we trust in a false reality. We promote a false reality. And we selfishly commit sin and iniquity.

Those who reject the reality of God will likewise reject the justice of God, because justice shines light on reality. The vain have no concern for justice. They reject justice because justice upholds the rights of others and brings equity to the innocent. But the vain and the selfish do not care about others. Their only concern is for their lusts and love of iniquity. They are inherently greedy and deluded. This is vanity.

*Your words have been stout against me, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, **It is vain to serve God**: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, **in that day when I make up my jewels**; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. **Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.** (Malachi 3:13 – 18)*

Those without faith, who do not believe in God, or the promises of God, or the truth of God, and reject the benefit of serving God. Their eyes do not see afar off. They only see the physical reality of the here and now. They see the heathen and the unbelieving living it up, partying, and having good times. They think that those who are indulging in sin are happy and prospering. They lust after the false happiness of the ungodly.

Those without faith fail to comprehend that this life is a test. They fail to appreciate the opportunity they have to develop character, assimilate greater light and truth, and ascend in glory by obedience to the commandments of God.

In their vanity, they reject the promises of God, and so, in the next life, they shall endure great sorrow as they see their fate and contrast it with the fate of the righteous. Then shall they “discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.” Then shall their envy of the wicked and their desires to do evil finally be perceived as vanity.

***But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.** (Matthew 15:9)*

Striving to live the gospel actually works really well when the doctrines being taught, believed, and practiced actually reflect the reality of God. When we understand, believe, and practice the doctrine of Christ as intended, we receive and retain a remission of sins, we receive the Holy Ghost, and we experience on a daily basis the revelations, visions, and visitations promised to the faithful.

But we worship in vain when the doctrines in question are merely the vain doctrines and commandments of men. When we do not receive the blessings promised to the faithful then this is a sure indication that our faith and understanding are inaccurate, ineffectual, and vain.

On this topic, I highly recommend Robert Smith's book: Teaching for Doctrines the Commandments of Men: Tradition in Modern Mormonism.

*And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are **vain**. Therefore, let no man glory in men. (1 Corinthians 3:20 - 21) Woe unto them that are **wise in their own eyes**, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink. (Isaiah 5:21 - 22) O that cunning plan of the evil one! O the **vainness**, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! **When they are learned they think they are wise**, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God. (2 Nephi 9:28 - 29)*

Those who are wise in their own eyes are drunk with vanity. They are insensible to their foolishness and folly. They think they are learned, wise, and have got things figured out, but they stagger and faint in their ignorance and lack of spiritual vigor. They are without a compass, stars, or maps to show them the way because they reject the knowledge, understanding, orientation, and situational awareness offered by God. Their judgement is vain, and their deepest thoughts are mere sparks before the brilliant glory of the Son of God. They perish in darkness although it is noonday.

*But **shun profane and vain babblings**: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. (2 Timothy 2:16)*

In the eyes of God, the wisdom of scholars is no more than profane and wise babbling. The professors of religion and the unrepentant students of scripture and ancient languages cannot comprehend what they seek and yearn most to know. This is because they are looking from the ground up, but what they seek can only be recognized and understood from the perspective of heaven looking down.

One must repent, be reconciled with God, and understand the character of God, being filled with the Holy Spirit of God, in order to correctly receive and comprehend the mysteries of the scriptures and the mysteries of God.

It is vain and useless to seek after the deep mysteries of the kingdom without first receiving the power of Godliness, through perfect faith and perfect repentance. Hence, we should shun the speculation of those who are not initiated into God's kingdom, and who have not received the anointing of the Holy Ghost within them.

*And the large and spacious building, which thy father saw, is **vain imaginations** and the pride of the children of men. (1 Nephi 12:18)*

As it turns out, democracy is a poor indication of truth. The innumerable hoards of the ignorant clamor to enter the great and spacious building, which is the wisdom of the world, the honors of man, the lusts of the profane, and the objects of idolatry and vanity had among ungodly.

In our imagination, vanity, and pride, we devalue the goodness of God. We would do well to recognize the wisdom of the world for what it is: sheer vanity.

*I have **labored in vain**, I have spent my strength for naught and in vain... (1 Nephi 21:4)*

Vanity is the seed of sorrow. When we labor in vain, in delusion, and in ignorance, we receive the fruits of vanity: bitterness and sorrow.

*Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, **false and vain and foolish doctrines**, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark. And the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them. Yea, they have all gone out of the way; they have become corrupted. (2 Nephi 28:9 - 11)*

If we only knew the hearts of those who teach such false, vain, and foolish doctrines. If we had eyes to see the motives and realities they seek to conceal, and if we suddenly beheld in vision their secret works of darkness and evil, we would not be tempted to follow them or believe their vain teachings.

In the final analysis, when the blood of the saints they have slain cries from the ground against them, and when our eyes are finally opened in judgement and in truth, we will know then of their corruption and evil. But too late it seems. The prophets of God tirelessly work to warn and teach that we might be wise to this great evil.

The Book of Mormon is replete with warnings and prophecies positioned to alert us of the evils of our time. In particular, this book warns us, again and again, of the corruption of the latter-day Gentile church. As we understand and heed these warnings, we are empowered to abide the day. When we fail, we are not.

Nevertheless, this did not put an end to the spreading of **priestcraft** through the land; for there **were many who loved the vain things of the world**, and they went forth preaching false doctrines; and this they did for the sake of riches and honor. (Alma 1:16)

An entire book could be written on this verse, but in the meantime, a short paragraph must suffice.

The object of priestcraft is to gain vanity by teaching vanity. We would do well to understand and identify the signs and tokens of priestcraft. And to guard against it.

*For they saw and beheld with great sorrow that **the people of the church** began to be lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and to set their hearts upon riches and upon the vain things of the world, that they began to be scornful, one towards another, and they began to persecute those that did not believe according to their own will and pleasure. (Alma 4:8)*

The object of Christianity is to do good, become good, and receive everything that is good, both in this life and the next. But those who lust for riches and the vain things of the world depart from that and enter into sin by seeking after that which offers less value, less benefit, and a less than satisfactory final outcome. Christians and members of the church are just as culpable as anyone else. This scripture foreshadows what we can expect to see within the Gentile church in the last days.

*O ye workers of iniquity; ye that are puffed up in the vain things of the world, **ye that have professed to have known the ways of righteousness nevertheless have gone astray**, as sheep having no shepherd, notwithstanding a shepherd hath called after you and is still calling after you, but ye will not hearken unto his voice! (Alma 5:37)*

There are many who profess to know God, hold the priesthood of God, and advocate the ways of righteousness, but have nevertheless gone astray. Such as these do not correctly understand or teach faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, or the gift of the Holy Ghost. Rather, they teach that we can continue to exist in sin all the days of our lives and still receive the redeeming grace of the atonement of Christ unto salvation and eternal life. This is because they do not love righteousness but are puffed up in the vain things of this world. When our hearts are upon the vain things of the world we have a very difficult time comprehending the truth of God, believing the truth of God, and applying the truth of God. Many believe that their hearts are pure, while the actual thoughts and intents of their hearts beguile them.

Those who truly know the ways of righteousness will be acquainted with the King of Righteousness, even Jesus Christ. As long as our hearts are displaced upon the vain things of the world, this will never happen. We must set our hearts upon him and his glory, and nothing else.

*And now my beloved brethren, I say unto you, can ye withstand these sayings; yea, can ye lay aside these things, and trample the Holy One under your feet; yea, can ye be puffed up in the pride of your hearts; yea, will ye still persist in the wearing of **costly apparel** and setting your hearts upon the **vain things of the world**, upon your riches? (Alma 5:53)*

Again and again, the prophets in the Book of Mormon warn us against setting our hearts upon the vain things of the world. They warn against wearing costly apparel and seeking riches. I might suggest that how we seek and why we seek makes all of the difference. It has gotten ridiculously expensive to provide for a family. But we need not be pretentious, extravagant, or vain in our intent or lifestyle.

In Alma chapter 5, he is advocating complete and perfect repentance as a requirement to enter the kingdom of God. He is leaving no stone unturned. Seeking after riches and the vain things of the world is one of our most common stumbling blocks. It easily prevents our believing and applying the true doctrine of Christ.

*But behold, I trust that ye are not in a state of so much **unbelief** as were your brethren; I trust that ye are not lifted up in the **pride** of your hearts; yea, I trust that ye have not set your hearts upon **riches** and the vain things of the world; yea, I trust that ye do not worship **idols**, but that ye do worship the true and the living God, and that ye **look forward for the remission of your sins**, with an everlasting faith, which is to come. (Alma 7:6)*

There is a lot of content here. But to be short, he lists unbelief, pride, seeking riches, worshiping idols, and setting our hearts upon the vain things of the world as deviations from looking forward for the remission of sins. Those whose hearts are set upon such things do not believe and do not look forward to a remission of sins. They consider the doctrine of remission of sins as vain and ridiculously impossible.

Unbelief is the great stumbling block to faith. Unbelief is caused by vanity.

*And now behold, my beloved brethren, I say unto you, do not suppose that this is all; for after ye have done all these things, **if ye turn away the needy, and the naked, and visit not the sick and afflicted, and impart of your substance, if ye have, to those who stand in need**—I say unto you, if ye do not any of these things, behold, **your prayer is vain**, and availeth you nothing, and ye are as hypocrites who do deny the faith. (Alma 34:28)*

There is no point in praying for forgiveness or the blessings of heaven if you are going to turn away the poor. Without charity, you are nothing, and your faith and prayers are in vain. It's that simple.

And by the way, paying tithing does almost nothing to help the poor. Less than 1% of tithing goes to help the poor. If you do the math using easily obtainable statistics, this is easily proven to be true.

*Suffer not yourself to be led away by any vain or foolish thing; suffer not the devil to lead away your heart again after those wicked **harlots**. Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites; for when they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words. (Alma 39:11)*

Spending time with harlots, so include any form of sexual deviancy, or viewing pornography, is vanity. Such vanity and iniquity will render your faith vain. Sexual lust cannot coexist with righteousness or the Spirit of God.

*O, how could you have forgotten your God in the very day that he has delivered you? But behold, it is to get gain, to be praised of men, yea, and that ye might get gold and silver. And **ye have set your hearts upon the riches and the vain things of this world**, for the which ye do murder, and plunder, and steal, and bear false witness against your neighbor, and do all manner of iniquity. (Helaman 7:20 - 21)*

It has been said that the love of money is the root of all evil. When we set our hearts upon riches, this invariably stimulates a multiplicity of sins. Such is vanity.

*O how foolish, and how vain, and how evil, and devilish, and **how quick to do iniquity, and how slow to do good**, are the children of men; yea, how quick to hearken unto the words of the evil one, and to set their hearts upon the vain things of the world! (Helaman 12:4)*

Vanity is the natural state of the fallen man. Our task is to rise above vanity by seeking and embracing the truth of God. We are to follow God by doing good. We do good by believing and doing those things that generate the most value, the best benefit, and the most favorable outcome.

*And in the days of your poverty ye shall cry unto the Lord; and **in vain shall ye cry**, for your desolation is already come upon you, and your destruction is made sure; and then shall ye weep and howl in that day, saith the Lord of Hosts. And then shall ye lament, and say: O that I had repented, and had not killed the prophets, and stoned them, and cast them out. Yea, in that day ye shall say: O that we had remembered the Lord our God in the day that he gave us our riches, and then they would not have become slippery that we should lose them; for behold, our riches are gone from us. (Helaman 13:32 - 33)*

The prophet warns that if we procrastinate the day of our repentance that our sorrow and regret will be everlastingly too late. We would do well not to procrastinate the day of our repentance. Procrastination, too often, is the essence of vanity.

The longer we procrastinate our repentance, the more ineffectual our repentance becomes.

*Wherefore, let all men beware how they take my name in their lips—For behold, verily I say, that many there be who are under this condemnation, **who use the name of the Lord, and use it in vain, having not authority**. (Doctrine and Covenants 63:61 - 62)*

Contrary to popular belief, priesthood ordination does not bestow priesthood authority; the Holy Ghost bestows priesthood authority. When we claim priesthood authority, and when we invoke Christ's name without the authority of the Holy Ghost, we bring ourselves under condemnation and sin. We need to be very careful about vainly claiming the authority of the Holy Priesthood. Those who vainly claim the authority of the Holy Priesthood are guilty of priestcraft. Let us not have vanity by vainly claiming something we do not have.

*And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—Which **vanity and unbelief** have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all. And they shall remain under this condemnation until they*

*repent and remember the new covenant, even the **Book of Mormon** and the former commandments which I have given them, not only to say, but to do according to that which I have written. (Doctrine and Covenants 84:54 - 57)*

It is vanity not to place maximum value in the teachings of the Book of Mormon and in the untarnished revelations of Joseph Smith. This vanity is caused by sin and unbelief. If we continue in this vanity, we will be doomed to the condemnation of hell.

*That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to **cover our sins**, or to **gratify our pride**, our **vain ambition**, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, **Amen to the priesthood** or the authority of that man. (Doctrine and Covenants 121:36 - 37)*

The enemy of priesthood power is vanity.

When we live in rejection of the truth, in rejection of reality, seeking for that which will not satisfy, doing evil by choosing that with lesser value, lesser benefit, and reduced outcome, we grieve the Spirit of the Lord, and it withdraws from us.

We only have priesthood power by faith in Christ, perfect repentance, and by the gift of the Holy Ghost. Without the Holy Ghost, we are left to ourselves.

As it turns out, some of the most surefire ways to grieve the Spirit is by:

1. Undertaking to conceal our sins from others,
2. Gratify our pride,
3. Pursue our vain ambitions, and to
4. Exercise control, dominion, or compulsion upon others in any manner other than by kindness, persuasion, long-suffering, pure knowledge, gentleness, and by love unfeigned. (See verses 41-43)

If we would retain priesthood, we should reprove only when moved upon by the Holy Ghost, without hypocrisy, and without guile.

This concludes my brief commentary on scriptures about vanity. It should by now be readily apparent that vanity comes in many forms, but for your edification and as a recap, here is my list of **Definitions of Vanity** once again.

1. When we judge something that is good, or of greater value, to be evil, or of lesser value.
2. When we judge something that is evil, or of lesser value, to be good, or of greater value.
3. Ineffectual beliefs that are not based on reality.

That which is untrue, false, deceptive, illusionary, or bogus.

4. Beliefs and actions that prove to be futile, useless, pointless, worthless, impotent, powerless, and ineffective, because they are not based on reality and truth.
5. A pursuit that does not lead to improvement, benefit, or the best outcome.
6. That which will not satisfy our needs, appetites, or desires.

Empty pleasure. Vain pursuit. A useless and futile desire or endeavor.

Doing something without receiving the hoped-for results.

7. Doing things that cause vexation, frustration, and additional damage.
8. When we say someone has vanity, we are saying they are ostentatious, pretentious, arrogant, egocentric, boastful, conceited, prideful, displaying false dignity, false virtue, and pretending to offer value that is hollow and meaningless.

We should all be opposed to vanity because vanity is ignorance and rejection of reality. We should embrace truth. After all, it is the truth that sets us free.

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

Amen.

For more information and teachings on acquiring and disseminating light and truth, I enthusiastically recommend reading: [*The Glory of God is Intelligence*](#), by **Robert Smith**.