

LDS Epistemology: How We Know What's True

The Law of Witnesses: A Multi-Witness Approach to Truth | Debate Quick Reference

THE CORE QUESTION

How do you know what you claim to know?
Epistemology = the study of knowledge and justified belief. Every worldview must answer this. Most people inherit their epistemology from socialization without examining it.

THREE APPROACHES COMPARED

Approach	Method	Fatal Weakness
Protestant	Scripture alone	Circular: X proves X; 45,000+ denominations
Catholic	Papal authority	Single-point; fallible "infallibility"
LDS	Multiple witnesses	Requires effort (feature, not bug)

THE LDS MODEL: LAW OF WITNESSES

"In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." — Deut. 19:15, 2 Cor. 13:1
"If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me." — John 5:31-32

THE 5 WITNESSES (Hansen Model):

1. **INTUITION** — God-given moral sense; "light of Christ" to all
2. **SENSORY DATA** — Observable, testable, repeatable evidence
3. **REASON** — Logic, mathematics, deduction from premises
4. **MORAL OUTCOMES** — "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt 7:16)
5. **AUTHORITY** — Scripture, prophets, personal revelation

CRITICAL INSIGHT: Witnesses CHECK each other

- Revelation contradicting scripture? **Reject**.
 - Scripture with bad fruits? **Examine carefully**.
 - Authority without spiritual confirmation? **Withhold**.
 - Personal "revelation" vs prophetic consensus? **Suspect yourself**.
- Truth = CONVERGENCE of multiple witnesses**

WHY SOLA SCRIPTURA FAILS

CIRCULAR REASONING: "Scripture interprets scripture" = X proves X
Orthodox-Reformed Bridge: "The Protestant appeal to Scripture to defend sola scriptura is a textbook example of circular reasoning."

Question	Their Answer	Problem
How know Bible is true?	Bible says so	Circular
Who decided canon?	Church councils	Authority they reject
How interpret disputes?	Scripture interprets	45,000 denominations

WHEN PRESSED, THEY BORROW OTHER WITNESSES:

"The Spirit testified" → *So prophecy continues? Welcome to LDS!*
"Archaeology proves it" → *See Lincoln Vampire Slayer problem*
"Fulfilled prophecy" → *Requires interpretation = authority*

THE CANON PROBLEM

Who decided the 66 Protestant books?
Answer: Council of Rome (382), Hippo (393), Carthage (397)
Contradiction: Accept council authority to ESTABLISH canon, reject authority to INTERPRET it

THE LINCOLN VAMPIRE SLAYER PROBLEM

CLAIM: "Bible is historically accurate, therefore true"
PROBLEM: Historical settings ≠ supernatural validation

Text	Historical	Unproven
<i>Lincoln: Vampire Hunter</i>	Lincoln real, Civil War	Vampires
<i>The Iliad</i>	Troy discovered 1870s	Greek gods
Religious texts	Ancient cities	Miracles

Troy's existence doesn't make Zeus real.
Archaeology is interesting but cannot prove faith claims.

THIS IS NOT "JUST FEELINGS"

FAIR: "It is a fundamental misunderstanding to say the LDS revelatory experience is exclusively 'emotional.' The united witness of **mind and heart** is key. The LDS approach is **holistic**."

D&C 8:2: God speaks "in your **mind** and in your **heart**"
Elder Oaks: "Burning" = comfort and serenity, not literal heat

HOW LDS KNOW SOMETHING IS TRUE

Multiple witnesses CONVERGING:

1. **Studied it** (Reason + Sensory Data)
2. **Received spiritual witness** (Revelation/Intuition)
3. **Heard prophetic testimony** (Authority)
4. **Witnessed good fruits** (Moral Outcomes)

"Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?" — Luke 24:32

PAUL ON EPISTEMOLOGY (1 Cor. 2:9-14)

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard... But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit... the **natural man receiveth not** the things of the Spirit... for they are **spiritually discerned**."

Paul explicitly states: Some truth requires spiritual discernment. Limiting yourself to empirical data alone blinds you to part of reality.

THE BLIND MEN & THE ELEPHANT

Relying on ONE witness = blind men touching different parts:

- **Empiricists:** Only what can be measured
 - **Rationalists:** Only what can be deduced
 - **Fideists:** Only what authority declares
- LDS: Use ALL witnesses. See the whole elephant.**

THE SUBJECTIVITY ARGUMENT

OBJECTION: "All religious claims are subjective. If there were objective proof, there'd be no atheists."

RESPONSE: This proves TOO much.

- By this logic, ALL positions are "subjective" (including atheism)
- If lack of unanimity = subjectivity, then science is subjective too (flat-earthers exist)
- Objective truth can exist even when people reject it
- The issue isn't whether truth is objective—it's how we ACCESS it

LDS ANSWER: Revelation is subjective in experience but objective in source (God). Multiple witnesses help verify the source isn't self-deception.

"ALL RELIGIONS CLAIM SPIRITUAL WITNESSES"

LDS theology accounts for this:

- Light of Christ given to ALL (John 1:9)
- Truth exists in every religion
- God works with all His children
- Spirit witnesses TRUTH wherever found

KEY DIFFERENTIATOR: LDS don't rely on spiritual experience ALONE. We require convergent witnesses. Spiritual + Scripture + Fruits + Reason.

JOSEPH SMITH ON KNOWING

"Search the scriptures... ask your Heavenly Father... He will answer you by the power of His Holy Spirit. **You will then know for yourselves and not for another.** You will not then be dependent on man for the knowledge of God." — TPJS, pp. 11-12

QUICK DEBATE RESPONSES

Objection	Response
"Bible interprets itself"	Circular. 45,000 denominations disagree on interpretation
"Archaeology proves it"	Troy ≠ Zeus. History ≠ miracles
"I just have faith"	Faith in WHAT? Heb 11:1 = "evidence of things not seen"
"Spirit told me"	So prophecy continues? Welcome to LDS!
"Feelings deceive"	Mind + Heart (D&C 8:2). Multiple witnesses check each other
"Adding to scripture"	Using biblical pattern (Deut 19:15, 2 Cor 13:1)
"All religions claim this"	LDS theology expects this. We require MULTIPLE witnesses
"It's all subjective"	Then so is atheism. Objective truth exists; access is the question

THE BOTTOM LINE

Protestant: X proves X (circular)
Catholic: Pope arbitrates (single authority)
Secular: Only empirical (artificially limited)
LDS: Multiple witnesses converge (robust, biblical)

What do YOU believe and WHY?
One witness testifying of itself = problem.
Multiple witnesses converging = foundation.