

Anyone who has attempted to mediate more than one dispute will recognize a pattern within most disagreements. This pattern is one of misunderstanding.

It is an unfortunate truth that when humans are hurt, afraid, or angry we often attach to a storyline riddled with assumptions and inaccuracies. Someone who is neutral, however, can make room for benign explanations of another person's behavior. More often than not, as the complete story unfolds, it is possible to see how each party landed where they landed. In nearly every dispute we find partial truths guiding our perceptions.

We begin to run into serious trouble when a misinterpretation becomes the foundation that we build future experiences upon. This very human behavior transcends culture and era and is richly represented throughout classic literature. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Les Miserables*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* are all beautifully written examples of how our assumptions can feel so right and yet be so terribly, terribly wrong.

It is for these reasons that the purpose of a WCL is first and foremost to discern righteously.

Once this requirement of righteous discernment has been fulfilled, it is then and only then that a WCL ought to determine whether a man should retain his priesthood certificate.

Protection for the community, if that is the goal, can only happen after the whole story has been uncovered and viewed through an unbiased lens. If, by God's righteous judgement, a man should retain his priesthood certificate and yet he has it removed by a WCL who did not follow the Lord's instructions nor the spirit thereof, then the community has in fact been harmed. The harm, however, is done not by the man but by the WCL itself.

This is the spirit of the due process the Lord has given us. It is found in both the WCL revelations and in the Bill of Rights. The shared spirit is to ensure the accused is given a fair opportunity to tell their side of the story. It expects the courts, WCLs, and WCFs to do everything in their power to ensure fair treatment and righteous discernment before passing judgement.

We can also see the wisdom in applying this principle to our day to day lives. We have been instructed to refrain from gossip and instead seek to understand one another. If we are asked to strive for these standards in our relationships, how much more important is it to hold these standards in our councils and conferences?

Reasoning about Witnesses & Testimony

If accusations were enough to find a person guilty, neither judgement nor discernment would be necessary. In reality, humans get things wrong all the time. By structuring WCL's as a trial, the Lord is expecting us to recognize that we do not have immaculate discernment. The goal of a WCL, therefore, is to hear all evidence available before passing judgement.

“... it is also not wise for the direction I have given to be used to achieve a predetermined outcome. The outcome should be based on, and the result of, what is learned in the council.” June 20th revelation

This is the purpose behind allowing a man to “speak on his behalf”. His side of the story must be heard in its entirety with the same consideration and presumption of innocence as is given to his accusers.

It is not possible for a WCL to hear the available evidence if the accused and his witnesses are not allowed to participate. Actions taken by a WCL to stop a man from presenting his case will in fact work to cripple their own discernment. A WCL can not judge righteously under these conditions.

Although the Lord did not name them specifically, there are due process rights that affect a man’s ability to “*speak on his behalf*” in a council. Again, this is about the spirit of the law that allows for a fair council to be held.

- A man should be given the details - the what, when, where, and witness claims - of the accusations against him. Without this information the man will be unable to compile and arrange all relevant information for the WCL to consider.
- For the purpose of discernment, any time the WCL allows witnesses or accusations they MUST allow the man to prepare his defense and speak on his behalf for those specific claims. Again, this cannot be done without supplying the man with the details of those accusations.
- A man needs sufficient time to prepare his defense. WCLs grant themselves time to gather and organize their own evidence and witnesses. If the aim is for a fair council, a man should be allowed the same time and opportunity to prepare his defense
- And finally the Lord states a man should be allowed to “*call upon such witnesses as he chooses*”. This emphasizes that WCLs do not have the right to place limitations on a man’s witnesses whether by quantity, or by type (character, factual, expert, material, etc.), or by withholding the details a man needs to be able choose relevant witnesses.

If a WCL hearing exists for any reason at all, it is for the purpose of discernment. It is clear the Lord has instructed us to hear a man’s defense by his own words and by the words of whoever would witness on his behalf. This is for the benefit of the man and the benefit of the WCL so that we may discern to the very best of our ability.

Even if the Lord would give us divinatory spiritual insights, He certainly won’t do so if we’re disregarding His revelations, the spirit thereof, and the information a man desires to present on his own behalf.