

Millet, Robert L., “This is My Gospel” in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Gospel Insights from General Authorities and Religious Educators*, (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), 389–411.

“This is My Gospel”

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After at least two days of instruction, worship, and intense spiritual experience, the risen Lord appeared once again to His American Hebrews. The twelve disciples of the Nephites “were gathered together and were united in mighty prayer and fasting.” When Jesus appeared, He inquired as to their desires. “Lord,” they answered, “we will that thou wouldst tell us the name whereby we shall call this church; for there are disputations among the people concerning this matter” (3 Nephi 27:1–3). In this context the living Christ sets forth some of the most straightforward yet profound doctrine to be found in the entire Book of Mormon concerning the name and mission of His Church.

His Name and His Church

It is not clear why disputations arose among the Nephites concerning the name of the Church. Since the days of Alma, in which a formal church structure and organization had been established, it appears that the Saints had been called the members of the “church of Christ” or the “church of God” (see Mosiah 18:17; 25:18, 23; Alma 4:5; 3 Nephi 26:21). With the end of the Mosaic dispensation and the initiation of the Messianic, a new day had dawned; it was the meridian or focal point of salvation history, the age in which the Lord Omnipotent, the long-awaited promised Messiah, would “come down from heaven among the children of men, and . . . dwell in a tabernacle of clay” (Mosiah 3:5). We recall that Jesus had earlier given the priesthood authority to baptize to Nephi and the twelve disciples (see 3 Nephi 11:22) when in fact they already held authority from God to perform the saving ordinances. Likewise, Jesus baptized those who had previously been baptized (see 3 Nephi 19:10–12). But it was a new day, a new light, and a new revelation. ^[1]

Even though the Nephites had held the fulness of the priesthood and had enjoyed the blessings of the everlasting gospel from the days of Lehi and Nephi, they continued to observe the law of Moses. That is, they offered sacrifice just as Adam had done two and a half millennia before, and they conformed to the law’s “myriad moral principles and its endless ethical restrictions. . . . There is . . . no intimation in the Book of Mormon that the Nephites offered the daily sacrifices required by the law or that they held the various feasts that were part of the religious life of their Old World

kinsmen.” ^[2] Because the faithful among the Nephites accepted and treasured the blessings of the gospel, because they looked forward with an eye of faith to the coming of the Holy One, because they knew full well the central message of the law and thus comprehended with certainty the law as a means to Him who was and is the great End, the law of Moses had become dead unto them. They were “alive in Christ because of [their] faith” in Him (2 Nephi 25:25) and because they had learned to distinguish tokens from covenants and ritual from religion. It was a new era—the beginning of the Dispensation of the Meridian of Time—and they had only recently been initiated anew into the covenants and ordinances (see 3 Nephi 11:22). Perhaps for these reasons the people had begun to wonder if there was a new or different name by which the congregation of Christians in this new dispensation was to be called and known.

The Master’s words to His chosen twelve suggest that there may have been some among the Nephites who proposed to name the church something other than the Church of Jesus Christ:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, why is it that the people should murmur and dispute because of this thing?

“Have they not read the scriptures, which say ye must take upon you the name of Christ, which is my name? For by this name shall ye be called at the last day;

“And whoso taketh upon him my name, and endureth to the end, the same shall be saved at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:4–6).

Our Lord’s words are most instructive. The Church or body of Christ is a true and living thing only to the degree that it is imbued and animated by Christ. Like an individual, the Church must take upon it the name of Christ—His divine influence, attributes, and nature—in order to enjoy His transforming powers. Those who are noble in character, kindly in deed and manner, considerate and compassionate—what the bulk of the Western world would call “Christian” in nature—but who refuse to take upon themselves the name of Christ (and all that such a commitment entails), are not fully Christ’s, nor are they Christians in the total and complete sense. They remain in a lost and fallen state, yielding to

the enticings of the spirit of the evil one and to the nature of things in a fallen world. They are without God in the world (see Alma 41:11) and, as such, are without tie to the family of God. They are spiritual orphans, nameless and family-less, in a lone and dreary world. And what of the Church? It is made up of people, and to the degree that those congregants are as yet unredeemed and unregenerated, the Church cannot be the light that is so desperately needed in a darkened world, cannot make available that life and that energy that flow from its great Head.

From the days of Adam, the divine decree has gone forth: “Thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore” (Moses 5:8). *All* things are to be done in His holy name—*all* things. We are to speak, act, preach, and prophesy in the name of the Son. We are to heal the sick and raise the dead in the name of the Son. We are to conduct the business of the Church and perform the ordinances of salvation in the name of the Son. We are to do what we do in the name of Jesus Christ and speak and act the way our blessed Master would under similar circumstances. The holy scriptures—as vital an instrument as they are in pointing us to the words and works of the Perfect One—do not provide us with the only pattern by which we gauge our actions and direct our labors. The people of God seek to be led by the power of the Holy Ghost, the oldest and most enduring “book” of living scripture, that sure and certain guide that shows and tells all things that need to be done (see 2 Nephi 32:3, 5).

Through baptism and rebirth we signify, according to Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “our commitment to do all that we can to achieve eternal life in the kingdom of our Father. We are expressing our candidacy—our determination to strive for—exaltation in the celestial kingdom.” Further, we “take upon us [Christ’s] name as we publicly profess our belief in him, as we fulfill our obligations as members of his Church, and as we do the work of his kingdom. But there is something beyond these familiar meanings, because what we witness [in the sacrament prayers] is not that we *take* upon us his name but that we are *willing* to do so. In this sense, our witness relates to some future event or status whose attainment is not self-assumed, but depends on the authority or initiative of the Savior himself.”^[3] That is, we have presently announced our righteous desires, and have entered into a covenant with God. We have announced our candidacy for exaltation, but have not yet received it. When the time comes that we have received the fulness of the Father, and have qualified for the highest of eternal rewards, we shall have the name of Christ sealed upon us forever. King Benjamin thus pleaded with his people: “I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, *that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life*” (Mosiah 5:15; emphasis added).

Only the children of Christ will be called by the name of Christ. Only those who have by covenant adoption taken upon them the holy name shall receive the rewards of holiness. Alma declared, “Behold, I say unto you, that the good shepherd doth call you; yea, and in his own name he doth call you, which is the name of Christ; and if ye will not hearken unto the voice of the good shepherd, to the name by which ye are called, behold, ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd.

“And now if ye are not the sheep of the good shepherd, of what fold are ye? Behold, I say unto you, that the devil is your shepherd, and ye are of his fold” (Alma 5:38–39).

In the same way, the Redeemer taught in a modern revelation:

“Behold, Jesus Christ is the name which is given of the Father, and there is none other name given whereby man can be saved;

“Wherefore, all men must take upon them the name which is given of the Father, for in that name shall they be called at the last day;

“Wherefore, if they know not the name by which they are called, they cannot have place in the kingdom of my Father” (D&C 18:23–25).

The Lord’s Church, with His name upon it, administers His gospel. It teaches His doctrine and makes available His ordinances. The Church of Jesus Christ is a service agency, an auxiliary if you will, established for the blessing and edification of individuals and families. Elder Russell M. Nelson observed: “The Church is the way by which the Master accomplishes His work and bestows His glory. Its ordinances and related covenants are the crowning rewards of our membership. While many organizations can offer fellowship and fine instruction, only His church can provide baptism, confirmation, ordination, the sacrament, patriarchal blessings, and the ordinances of the temple—all bestowed by authorized priesthood power. That power is destined to bless *all* children of our Heavenly Father.”^[4]

In summary, then, the Savior directed: “Therefore, whatsoever ye shall do, ye shall do it in my name; therefore ye shall call the church in my name; and ye shall call upon the Father in my name that he will bless the church for my sake” (3 Nephi 27:7). We ever pray for the growth and proliferation of the Church of Jesus Christ, which is the kingdom

of God on earth. We plead mightily for the expansion of the work of the Lord in all nations, and among all kindreds, tongues, and people. We petition the Father in the name of the Son, and when our prayers meet the divine standard they are offered under the direction of the Holy Ghost. We pray for the Church that bears the name of the Son, and we pray for special outpourings of light and power. More particularly, we pray for those who constitute the sheep of His fold. We ask sincerely that the judgments of God may be turned away and the mercies of heaven extended, all through the mediation and intercession of the Holy One of Israel (see Alma 33:11, 16).

Built upon His Gospel

We learn, however, that although being called after Christ's name is a necessary condition for it to be His church, such is not sufficient. The resurrected Lord stated that "*if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel*" (3 Nephi 27:8; emphasis added). Anyone can organize a church. Anyone can name that church the Church of Jesus Christ. And yet, as the Master affirms, it will not be His church unless it is built upon His gospel. I will note in this brief section when a church is *not* built upon His gospel, and then discuss the principles of Christ's gospel in the next.

We cannot really be built upon Christ's gospel if we do not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. Those who labor tirelessly to lighten burdens or alleviate human suffering but at the same time deny that Jesus Christ is God cannot have the lasting impact on society that they could have through drawing upon those spiritual forces that center in the Lord Omnipotent. Those in our day who focus endlessly on the moral teachings of Jesus but downplay His divine sonship miss the mark dramatically. C. S. Lewis warned us about saying that Jesus was nothing more than a moral teacher:

"I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."^[5]

In the absence of the real thing—the fulness of the gospel—many ideas and movements seek to occupy center stage. Among the more popular in today's world is a focus upon Jesus as a loving teacher, guide, and moral leader. For some persons, Jesus stands as the preeminent example of kindness, the ultimate illustration of social and interpersonal graciousness and morality. A favorite text for this group is the Sermon on the Mount, and their highest aspiration is to live the Golden Rule. A Roman Catholic philosopher has observed: "According to the theological liberal, [the Sermon on the Mount] is the essence of Christianity, and Christ is the best of human teachers and examples. . . . Christianity is essentially ethics. What's missing here? Simply, the essence of Christianity, which is *not* the Sermon on the Mount. When Christianity was proclaimed throughout the world, the proclamation (*kerygma*) was not 'Love your enemies!' but 'Christ is risen!' This was not a new *ideal* but a new *event*, that God became man, died, and rose for our salvation. Christianity is first of all not ideal but real, an event, news, the gospel, the 'good news.' The essence of Christianity is not Christianity; the essence of Christianity is Christ."^[6]

For many, the doctrine of Christ has been replaced by the ethics of Jesus. Those who insist that ethics must be discussed or taught or enforced point toward the declining moral standards of our day, the increase of drug abuse or teenage pregnancy, the prevalence of our inhumanity to each other. They contend that if Christianity is to make a difference in the world, we must find ways to transform ethereal theology into religious practice in a decaying society. They thus promote a social gospel—a relevant religion. The problem with a social gospel is that it is inherently and forevermore deficient as far as solving the real problems of human beings. It almost always focuses on symptoms rather than causes. Ethics is not the essence of the gospel, nor is it necessarily righteousness. The very word *ethics* has come to connote socially acceptable standards based on current consensus, as opposed to absolute truths based on divinely established parameters. Ethics is too often to virtue and righteousness what theology is to religion—a pale and wimpy substitute. Indeed, ethics without the virtue that comes through the cleansing powers of the Redeemer is like religion without God, at least the true and living God.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written, "It is one thing to teach ethical principles, quite another to proclaim the great doctrinal verities, which are the foundation of true Christianity and out of which eternal salvation comes. True it is that salvation is limited to those in whose souls the ethical principles abound, but true it is also that Christian ethics, in

the full and saving sense, automatically become a part of the lives of those who first believe Christian doctrines.” In summary, “It is only when gospel ethics are tied to gospel doctrines that they rest on a sure and enduring foundation and gain full operation in the lives of the saints.”^[7]

Latter-day Saints are often criticized for expending so much of the Church’s resources on missionary work or the construction of temples, indicating that the institutional Church should be more involved in leading or officially supporting a crusade or social cause. Where is your charity? they ask. Of what avail are your noble theological principles? they inquire. I agree with Elder Bruce C. Hafen of the Seventy, who pointed out that “the ultimate purpose of the gospel of Jesus Christ is to cause the sons and daughters of God to become as Christ is. Those who see religious purpose only in terms of ethical service in the relationship between man and fellowmen may miss that divinely ordained possibility. It is quite possible to render charitable—even ‘Christian’—service without developing deeply ingrained and permanent Christlike character. Paul understood this when he warned against giving all one’s goods to feed the poor without true charity. . . . *While religious philosophies whose highest aim is social relevance may do much good, they will not ultimately lead people to achieve the highest religious purpose, which is to become as God and Christ are.*”^[8]

The Savior declared to His Nephite followers that “if it so be that the church is built upon my gospel then will the Father show forth his own works in it” (3 Nephi 27:10). When the Saints of God have been true to their trusts and live worthy of the gifts and influence of the Holy Ghost, then the works of the Father—the works of righteousness, including deeds of Christian service, manifested in the actions and behavior of the faithful—flow forth from regenerate hearts. Those works are not the works of mortals alone but rather the doings of persons who have become new creatures in Christ. Their works are therefore the works of the Lord, for they have been motivated by the power of the Spirit. “I am crucified with Christ,” the Apostle Paul wrote: “nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). To the Philippian Saints he likewise beckoned: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For *it is God which worketh in you* both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12–13; emphasis added).

It is true that much of the time we do the works of righteousness simply out of a sense of duty and not always as a result of some overwhelming spiritual motivation within us. Such efforts attest to our willingness to be obedient, but along the way we must strive in prayer for a change of heart, for the Lord to prompt and direct our labors through His Spirit. Otherwise we spend our days operating merely in terms of expectation and requirement when we could be operating in terms of pure love and enjoyment. Without the Spirit and power of God providing impetus, meaning, purpose, and staying power for our poor efforts, we eventually experience a type of spiritual burnout; we continue to work to exhaustion, but our hearts are not in it. Though for a season we may serve because of good companionship, out of fear of punishment, because of duty or loyalty, and even as a part of a hope for an eternal reward, “if our service is to be most efficacious, it must be accomplished for the love of God and the love of his children. . . . [Laboring] with all of our heart and mind is a high challenge for all of us. Such service must be free of selfish ambition. It must be motivated only by the pure love of Christ.”^[9]

The Master warned what will happen if we seek to be His but are not built upon His gospel. If our effort “be not built upon my gospel,” He said, “and is built upon the works of men, or upon the works of the devil, verily I say unto you they have joy in their works for a season, and by and by the end cometh, and they are hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence there is no return” (3 Nephi 27:11). God’s work and glory is “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Our most noble work will be accomplished and our greatest glory will come to the degree that we are similarly occupied with this overarching objective. The works of the devil obviously pertain to carnality and devilishness, what Paul called “the works of the flesh”—such sins as adultery, fornication, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strife, and heresy (see Galatians 5:19–21). They bring pleasure and celestial titillation for a season, but they result inevitably in shrinkage of the soul, followed in time by bitter loneliness and that awful alienation from things of lasting worth. Indeed, “their works do follow them, for it is because of their works that they are hewn down” (3 Nephi 27:12).

The works of humankind may refer to what we know as honorable endeavors, worthwhile efforts to improve humanity and society, but labors whose focus is not truly on the Lord or His work and glory. So often the works of humankind bring glory to humankind. More often than not, the works of humankind hack away at the leaves of the inconsequential while ignoring the spiritual roots of attitudes and behavior. The poignant message of the Savior is that happiness, meaning lasting joy, comes only to those who are built upon His gospel and whose works are really the Lord’s works. So many people, as C. S. Lewis observed, “seek to invent some sort of happiness for themselves without God. And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history—money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, slavery—the long terrible story of people trying to find something other than God which will make

them happy. The reason why it can never succeed is this. God made us: invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. *Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself,* because it is not there. There is no such thing.”^[10]

Because we are so very limited in our vision, we are tempted to envy the financial success of those who spurn the laws and commandments of God. “They look happy and free,” Elder Glenn L. Pace remarked, “but don’t mistake telestial pleasure for celestial happiness and joy. Don’t mistake lack of self-control for freedom. Complete freedom without appropriate restraint makes us slaves to our appetites. Don’t envy a lesser and lower life.”^[11]

“This Is My Gospel”

Some things simply matter more than others. Some topics of discussion, even intellectually stimulating ones, must take a back seat to more fundamental verities. It is just so in regard to what the scriptures call the gospel or the doctrine of Christ, those foundational truths associated with the person and powers of Jesus the Messiah. Who He is and what He has done are paramount and central issues; all else, however supplementary, is secondary. The Prophet Joseph Smith was once asked about the basic tenets of Mormonism. “The fundamental principles of our religion,” he answered, “are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”^[12]

This statement by the Prophet highlights our duty as to what we ought to teach and what ought to receive the greatest stress in the Church. It suggests that occasionally it may be helpful, relative to our Church involvement, to ask the question, why are we doing what we are doing? If in fact our efforts do not (directly, or at least indirectly) assist the Saints in their quest to come unto Christ, then perhaps the particular program or activity has no place in the Church.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is, in the language of revelation, “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30). The true Church administers the gospel; salvation in this day and age will come through the covenants and ordinances administered and made available by the Church or it will not come at all. To speak of coming unto Christ independent of Christ’s Church or in defiance of His anointed servants is foolishness. It is, however, the gospel of Jesus Christ that saves (see Romans 1:16) and not the Church per se. Auxiliaries and programs and policies and procedures—though inspired from heaven and essential for the everyday operation and continuing expansion of the Lord’s kingdom—are of efficacy, virtue, and force only to the degree that they encourage and motivate the Saints to trust in and serve the Lord and thus receive His matchless mercy and grace.

The word *gospel* means, literally, God-news or good news. The gospel is the good news that Christ came, that He lived and died, and that He rose again to immortal glory. The gospel is the good news that through Christ we may be cleansed and renewed, transformed into new creatures. The gospel is the good news that through our Savior and Redeemer we can be delivered from death and sin to the abundant life. In short, the gospel is the “glad tidings . . .

“That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness;

“That through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him” (D&C 76:40–42).

To the Nephites, the risen Lord declared: “Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me” (3 Nephi 27:13).

The gospel is a sacred covenant, a two-way promise between God and humankind. Christ does for us what we could never do for ourselves. He offers Himself as a ransom for sin; He descends below all things that He and we might have the privilege of ascending to celestial heights; and He dies and rises from the tomb that we—in a way that is completely incomprehensible to the finite mind—might likewise come forth from death into resurrected, immortal glory. On our part, we agree to do those things that we can do for ourselves: we make a solemn promise to accept and receive Him as our Lord and Savior; to believe on His name and rely wholly upon His merits, mercy, and grace; to accept and receive the principles and ordinances of His gospel; and to strive all the days of our lives to endure faithfully to the end, meaning keep our covenants and walk in paths of truth and righteousness. “Viewed from our mortal position,” Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “the gospel is all that is required to take us back to the Eternal Presence, there to be crowned with glory and honor, immortality and eternal life.” He continued: “To gain these greatest of all

rewards, two things are required. The first is the atonement by which all men are raised in immortality, with those who believe and obey ascending also unto eternal life. This atoning sacrifice was the work of our Blessed Lord, and he has done his work. The second requisite is obedience on our part to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. Thus *the gospel is, in effect, the atonement. But the gospel is also all of the laws, principles, doctrines, rites, ordinances, acts, powers, authorities, and keys needed to save and exalt fallen man in the highest heaven hereafter.*”^[13]

It is probably the case that if one hundred Protestants were asked *where* the Atonement of Christ took place, those one hundred persons would answer: At Golgotha, on the cross. It is also no doubt true that if one hundred Latter-day Saints were asked the same question, a large percentage would respond: In Gethsemane, in the garden. In fact, the sufferings of Jesus Christ that began in the Garden of Gethsemane were consummated on the cross. Between noon and 3:00 P.M. on that fateful Friday, all of the agonies of Gethsemane returned, as the Spirit of our Heavenly Father was once again withdrawn from the Suffering Servant (see Matthew 27:46).^[14] Truly, the lowly Nazarene has trodden the winepress, meaning Gethsemane or the garden of the oilpress, alone (see D&C 76:107; 88:106; 133:50; Isaiah 63:3). In His own words, that awful agony in the Garden “caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—

“Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men” (D&C 19:18–19).

And as to the final phase of His redemptive labor, His foreordained place on the cross, He explained to the Nephites: “My Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me” (3 Nephi 27:14).

The scriptures—especially 3 Nephi 27—clearly and consistently teach that the principles of the gospel are as follows:

1. *Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.* Those who seek to enjoy the benefits of the Atonement of Christ must first learn to exercise faith in Christ. They must believe in Him, believe that He is, “that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that He has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend” (Mosiah 4:9). In the *Lectures on Faith*, Joseph Smith taught that three things are necessary in order for rational and intelligent beings to exercise saving faith in God or Christ. First, they must accept the idea that God actually exists; they must plant the seed of the word of God in their hearts and experiment upon (pray over and labor with) the fact that there actually is a Savior (see Alma 32–33). Second, they must have a correct idea of God’s character, attributes, and perfections; they must, from serious study and personal revelation, seek to understand what God is like. Third, they must gain an actual knowledge that the course of life they are pursuing accords with the will of God; they must know that their lives are worthy of divine approbation and thus of the blessings of heaven. The Prophet explained that the third requisite for faith—the peaceful assurance that we have pleased God—

comes only through our willingness to sacrifice all things for the kingdom’s sake.^[15] Faith in Jesus Christ, the first principle of the gospel, is thus based on evidence. And the more evidence we amass—external and internal—the greater our faith. We may, like the Zoramites, begin with the simple hope that there is a Christ and that salvation is available (see Alma 32:27), but in time that hope can, by the power of the Holy Ghost, ripen into the knowledge that one day we will not only be *with* Christ but *like* Him (see Moroni 7:41, 48; 1 John 3:2). The Savior teaches plainly that no person enters into His rest save their garments are washed in His blood, which cleansing comes by faith and repentance (see 3 Nephi 27:19).

2. *Repentance.* Once we come to know the Lord—of His power and greatness and perfections—we automatically sense our own inadequacies. We feel to shrink before the Lord Omnipotent; we cry out for mercy and pardon from the Holy One of Israel. And thus it is that repentance follows on the heels of faith; as we encounter the Master, we begin to discern the vast chasm between the divine realm and our own unholy state. Repentance is literally an “afterthought,” “a change of mind,” a change in perspective and lifestyle. Repentance is the process by which we discard the rags of uncleanness and through Christ begin to adorn ourselves in the robes of righteousness. It is the means by which we incorporate into our lives a power beyond our own, an infinite power that transforms us into new creatures, new creatures in Christ. It is only through “the repentance of all their sins” (3 Nephi 27:19) that the followers of Christ are enabled to go where God and Christ are.

3. *Baptism by water and by fire.* Jesus and His prophets have declared in unmistakable terms that salvation comes only to those who have been born again (see John 3:1–5; Mosiah 27:24–26; Alma 7:14). People must be born again or born from above in order to see and enter the kingdom of God. When the Spirit of the Lord brings about a

change of heart and takes the veil of darkness and unbelief from our eyes, we are born again to see and are thereby enabled to recognize and acknowledge the Lord's Church and His servants. We are born again to enter the kingdom only as we subscribe to the "articles of adoption," meaning the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, the legal requirements for entrance into Christ's family kingdom. ^[16] Joseph Smith taught, "Baptism is a sign to God, to angels, and to heaven that we do the will of God, and there is no other way beneath the heavens whereby God hath ordained for man to come to Him to be saved, and enter into the Kingdom of God, except faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins, and any other course is in vain; then you have the promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost." ^[17]

Baptism becomes the physical token of our acceptance of the atoning graces of our Lord. We go down into the "watery grave" and come forth as initiates, new citizens of the kingdom, as a sign of our ready acceptance of the Lord's burial in the tomb and His subsequent rise to newness of life in the Resurrection (see Romans 6:3–5). The baptism of fire takes place as the Holy Ghost, who is a sanctifier, takes from our souls the filth and dross of worldliness. The Prophet explained that "you might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man, if not done in view of the remission of sins and getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost." ^[18] That is to say, "Sins are remitted not in the waters of baptism, as we say in speaking figuratively, but when we receive the Holy Ghost. It is the Holy Spirit of God that erases carnality and brings us into a state of righteousness." ^[19] Men and women who come unto Christ through the appropriate ordinances are in time "sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost" (3 Nephi 27:20), meaning they are made pure and holy. Filth and dross—the elements of the natural world—are burned out of their souls as though by fire, thus giving rise to the expression "the baptism of fire." The Holy Ghost, that *revelator* who is the means by which we come to know the truth, is also a *sanctifier* and thus the means whereby we become people who are true. In time, through being sanctified, members of the Church come to abhor sin and cleave unto righteousness (see Alma 13:12).

4. *Enduring to the end.* Disciples of Christ in all ages are instructed to be baptized of water and of fire and to labor to maintain their worthy standing before God. The scriptures teach that to the degree the Saints of the Most High trust in the will and purposes of God and lean upon His mighty arm, as well as extend themselves in Christian service to the needy, they are able to *retain* that remission of sins from day to day (see Mosiah 4:11–12, 26; Alma 4:13). To endure to the end is to remain true to our covenants after baptism and live the life of Saints to the best of our ability, throughout the remainder of our lives. The commission is for members of the household of faith "to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life" (Mosiah 18:9). To endure to the end is to be "steadfast and immovable"—the scriptural phrase for spiritual maturity—and to press toward the high prize of eternal life (see Mosiah 5:15; 2 Nephi 31:16, 20; 33:4; D&C 6:13; 14:7). The scriptures plainly affirm that "whoso repenteth and is baptized in [Christ's] name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will [the Lord] hold guiltless before [the] Father at that day when [Christ] shall stand to judge the world" (3 Nephi 27:16).

People of the covenant are able to endure to the end, not just through personal grit and will power, not just by holding white-knuckled to the iron rod, but by cultivating the gift of the Holy Ghost. It is the Spirit that provides direction while we are encircled by the mists of darkness. It is the Spirit that provides moral courage to proceed along the gospel path while the tauntings and temptations emanating from the great and spacious building ring out loud and clear. And it is the Spirit that brings peace to the weary, hope to the faithful, and the promise of eternal life to those who continue to hunger and thirst after righteousness and are willing to serve God at all hazards. ^[20]

5. *Resurrection and eternal judgment.* In 1839 Joseph Smith observed that "the Doctrines of the Resurrection of the Dead and the Eternal Judgment are necessary to preach among the first principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." ^[21] Through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, as an unconditional benefit, all men and women will, in a limited sense, be redeemed from spiritual death. They will be raised from the grave and thereafter be brought to stand in the presence of the Almighty to be judged according to the deeds done in mortality. This principle of the gospel illustrates both the mercy and justice of God. Samuel the Lamanite testified that Christ "surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord" (Helaman 14:15; see also 2 Nephi 9:15, 21–22; Mormon 9:13). Christ reinforced this doctrinal teaching to His Nephite disciples:

"And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the

cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up [that is, raised from the dead] by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

“And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works” (3 Nephi 27:14–15).

What Gospel Shall We Teach?

The Book of Mormon is said to contain the fulness of the gospel (see D&C 20:9; 27:5; 35:12, 17; 42:12). Some have wondered how the Lord and His prophets could state this, when in fact the Book of Mormon contains no specific reference to such matters as eternal marriage, degrees of glory in the Resurrection, vicarious work for the dead, and so forth. Again, let us focus on what the gospel is. The Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel in the sense that it teaches the doctrine of redemption—that salvation is in Christ and in Him alone—and the principles of the gospel (faith, repentance, rebirth, enduring, resurrection, and judgment) more plainly and persuasively than any other book of scripture. The Book of Mormon does not necessarily contain the fulness of gospel doctrine. Rather, it is a sacred

repository of eternal truth relative to the most fundamental and far-reaching doctrine of all—the doctrine of Christ. [\[22\]](#)

We have received a divine commission from our Lord to teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom (see D&C 88:77). What is it that we should teach? Above and beyond all that might be said in sermons and lessons and seminars and discussions, what should be the walk and talk of the Latter-day Saints? Simply stated, we are to teach the gospel. Our primary message, like Paul’s, must be “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). If we have any hope of preserving the faith of our fathers among our people, of building firmly on the rock of revelation and the doctrines Joseph Smith taught, then we must ground and settle ourselves in Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice. We must, of course, teach all the doctrines of the gospel when it is appropriate to do so. But above all, we must see to it that “we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, . . . that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26). President Boyd K. Packer testified: “Truth, glorious truth, proclaims there is . . . a Mediator. . . . Through Him mercy can be fully extended to each of us without offending the eternal law of justice. *This truth is the very root of Christian doctrine. You may know much about the gospel as it branches out from there, but if you only know the branches and those branches do not touch that root, if they have been cut free from that truth, there will be no life nor substance nor redemption in them.*” [\[23\]](#)

We frequently hear that the gospel is universal, that Mormonism welcomes and embodies all that is true and good and ennobling. From this perspective, then, the gospel embraces the truths of the sciences, the arts, and great literature. Would it not follow, then, that whatever we taught in the meetings of the Church, so long as it were true, would be the gospel? If a man should address the congregation in sacrament meeting and speak for twenty minutes on the laws of motion or the process of photosynthesis, would he then be preaching the gospel? If a woman should decide to speak at length to her Spiritual Living class on the laws of genetics or the manner in which sentences may be properly diagrammed, would she then be bearing witness of the gospel? Certainly not. For although in a rather vague sense the gospel may be said to contain all truth, it should be clear to most discerning minds that the constant and consistent witness of the scripture is that only those truths tied to the doctrine of Christ have power to touch and lift and transform human souls. These are those of which the Holy Ghost will bear testimony, those which, when preached by that Spirit, result in mutual edification of both speaker and listener.

In 1984 Commissioner Henry B. Eyring delivered an address to teachers in the Church Educational System. He spoke soberly of the “sea of filth” which today’s youth encounter and of the absolute necessity for solid and sound gospel instruction in the effort to immunize the youth against the waywardness of the world:

“Now I would like to say this: There are two views of the gospel—both true. They make a terrific difference in the power of your teaching.

“One view is that the gospel is all truth. It is. The gospel is truth. With that view I could teach pretty well anything true in a classroom, and I would be teaching the gospel. The other view is that the gospel is the principles, commandments, and ordinances which, if kept, conformed with, and accepted, will lead to eternal life. That is also true.

“When I choose which of these views I will let dominate my teaching, I take a great step. If I take the view that the gospel is all truth, rather than that it is the ordinances and principles and commandments which, if kept, conformed with, and accepted, lead to eternal life, I have already nearly taken myself out of the contest to help a student withstand the sea of filth. Why? Because he needs to have his eyes focused on light, and that means not truth in some abstract sense but the joy of keeping the commandments and conforming with the principles and accepting the ordinances of the

gospel of Jesus Christ. If I decide I will not make that my primary vision of the gospel, I am already out of the contest to help my student with his capacity to see good and to want and desire it in the midst of filth.”^[24]

Conclusion

The Master summarized the gospel or doctrine of Christ for us and beautifully elucidated each of the principles of that gospel:

“And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.

“Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do;

“Therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:19–22).

These matters are sacred. They are among the mysteries of the kingdom, meaning they are to be known and

understood only by revelation from God.^[25] I add a personal witness to the effect that other great and marvelous things, further mysteries, are made known unto us, not as we wade in the morass of the unknown or the esoteric, but rather as we ponder upon, teach from, and focus on those plain and precious truths we know as the principles of the gospel. Profundity thus grows naturally out of simplicity.

Just thirteen days before his death, Elder McConkie affirmed the vital importance of teaching the doctrine of atonement. He stated: “Now, the atonement of Christ is the most basic and fundamental doctrine of the gospel, and it is the least understood of all our revealed truths. Many of us have a superficial knowledge and rely upon the Lord and his goodness to see us through the trials and perils of life. But if we are to have faith like Enoch and Elijah we must believe what they believed, know what they knew, and live as they lived. May I invite you to join with me in gaining a sound and sure knowledge of the Atonement. We must cast aside the philosophies of men and the wisdom of the wise and hearken to that Spirit which is given to us to guide us into all truth. We must search the scriptures, accepting them as the mind and will and voice of the Lord and the very power of God unto salvation.”^[26]

The gospel is the glad tidings concerning the infinite and eternal atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Atonement is central. It is the hub of the wheel; all other matters are spokes at best. The good news is that we can be changed, be converted, become different people in and through Christ. The good news is that we can come to perceive an entirely new realm of reality, a realm unknown to the world at large. It is a new life, a new life in Christ. In a time of stress and great uncertainty, thanks be to God for the peace and joy of the Spirit that can come to us through Christ and His gospel. In a day when we encounter somber and soul-stirring headlines on almost every page of the newspaper, God be praised that the good news of the gospel has been restored in our day through modern witnesses of Christ. “In the world ye shall have tribulation,” the Master acknowledged, and then He added, “but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Christ our Lord has overcome the world, and He has opened the door and made available to us the power to do the same. And surely there could be no better news, no more joyful tidings, than that.

^[1] Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 2:336.

^[2] Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 427.

^[3] Dallin H. Oaks, “Taking upon Us the Name of Jesus Christ,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 82–83.

^[4] Russell M. Nelson, ““Thus Shall My Church Be Called,”” *Ensign*, May 1990, 18.

^[5] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 55–56.

^[6] Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 83; emphasis in the original.

^[7] Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 699–700.

- [8] Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 196–97; emphasis added.
- [9] Dallin H. Oaks, “Why Do We Serve?” *Ensign*, November 1984, 14–15.
- [10] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 53–54; emphasis added.
- [11] Glenn L. Pace, “They’re Not Really Happy,” *Ensign*, November 1987, 40.
- [12] Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 121.
- [13] McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 34; emphasis added.
- [14] See James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1963), 661; see also Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979–81), 4:224, 226; Bruce R. McConkie, “The Purifying Power of Gethsemane,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 9–10; Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 3:205–6.
- [15] See Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 38 (3:2–5).
- [16] See Smith, *Teachings*, 328; see also Orson Pratt, *Orson Pratt’s Works* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1965), 48.
- [17] Smith, *Teachings*, 198.
- [18] Smith, *Teachings*, 314.
- [19] McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, 290; see also 239; see also 2 Nephi 31:17; Moroni 6:4.
- [20] See Smith, *Teachings*, 150.
- [21] Smith, *Teachings*, 149; see also 365.
- [22] See Ezra Taft Benson, *A Witness and a Warning* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 18–19.
- [23] Boyd K. Packer, “The Mediator,” *Ensign*, May 1977, 56; emphasis added.
- [24] Henry B. Eyring, “Eyes to See, Ears to Hear,” in *Supplement: Eighth Annual Church Educator’s Symposium: A Symposium on the New Testament* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1984), 11.
- [25] See Harold B. Lee, *Ye Are the Light of the World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 211.
- [26] McConkie, “The Purifying Power of Gethsemane,” 10.