

Make Your Calling and Election Sure

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Joseph Smith the Prophet declared that “Peter penned the most sublime language of any of the apostles.”¹ While it is in the first chapter of Peter’s second epistle that we encounter the invitation for us to become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4), both epistles point us powerfully toward that supernal ideal.

Let me first speak of the procedure we will follow in discussing this sacred and sensitive matter. It might be appropriate in a traditional academic conference to spend a significant portion of time reviewing the literature of non-LDS scholars on the writings of 2 Peter, debating the authorship and dating of the epistle, or detailing the various interpretive avenues that New Testament experts from the past have pursued. To be sure, there is much to be learned from scholars and churchmen from other faith traditions regarding the history, language, or culture behind a scriptural text. What follows, however, is a faith-based, Restoration-centered, doctrinal investigation of the subject. We do not turn to Roman Catholic scholars to teach us how to build temples or to Protestant theologians to receive insights into the proper place of covenants and ordinances. When it comes to doctrinal interpretation, our principal and

primary source must be the scriptures of the Restoration and the writings and sermons of latter-day apostles and prophets. This is a topic that can only be engaged seriously by a people well acquainted with premortal existence, temples, priesthood keys, sealing powers, and kingdoms of glory hereafter.

To avoid or ignore the distinctive insights provided by modern revelation is foolish at best and spiritually perilous at worst. In a revelation given in March of 1831, the Savior declared, “I have sent *mine everlasting covenant* into the world, *to be a light to the world, and to be a standard for my people*, . . . and to be a messenger before my face to prepare the way before me” (D&C 45:9; emphasis added). In September of that same year, the Lord offered similar counsel: “Behold, I, the Lord, have made my church in these last days like unto a judge sitting on a hill, or in a high place, to judge the nations. For it shall come to pass that *the inhabitants of Zion shall judge all things pertaining to Zion*” (D&C 64:37–38; emphasis added).

Latter-day Saint writers, including general church leaders, have not written of the doctrine of calling and election very often, not because it is a forbidden subject, but rather a sensitive one. Furthermore, because the Brethren have said very little about it publicly, that is not an announcement that we should avoid it like a plague, that the teaching has somehow fallen on hard times, that it has been officially relegated to the category of folklore or pop theology, that it is out of date, or that it is no longer held to be the doctrine of the church. For heaven’s sake, this precious truth is found in the standard works, within the New Testament, and the Doctrine and Covenants. And when it comes to relevance or timeliness in the twenty-first century, what could be more everlastingly pertinent than the quest for eternal life and the sweet assurance that one’s salvation is secure?

The Sanctification of the Soul

Peter begins with a description of the people of the church of Jesus Christ as the “elect according to the foreknowledge of God,” those who have, through the sanctifying blood of the Redeemer, been begotten into what Peter calls a “lively hope,” that is, a living hope—a sweet expectation, a sturdy anticipation, a dynamic assurance—of a glorious resurrection. These have placed themselves in a condition to enjoy “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,” those who “are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Peter 1:1–5).

In the second chapter of the first epistle, Peter reminds us that our Lord was guileless, that he never sinned. Thus a significant step toward becoming a partaker of the divine nature is being engaged in the imitation of Christ, the emulation of

the sinless Son of Man, following the steps of the prototype or standard for all saved beings (1 Peter 2:21–22).² C. S. Lewis observed that “Whatever may have been the powers of unfallen man, it appears that those of redeemed man will be *almost* unlimited. Christ is bringing up human nature with Him. Where He goes, it goes too. It will be made ‘like Him.’” Lewis pointed out that divine miracles “anticipate powers which all men will have when they also are ‘sons’ of God and enter into that ‘glorious liberty.’” Christ becomes not a prodigy, but “a pioneer. He is the first of His kind; He will not be the last.”³

In the fourth chapter, Peter challenges the Saints to gain “the same mind” as Christ (compare 1 Corinthians 2:16). “For you who have suffered in the flesh should cease from sin, that you no longer the rest of your time in the flesh, should live to the lusts of men, but to the will of God” (Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Peter 4:1–2). Peter also reminds the members that because they are living at the end of the age, the final days of the meridian dispensation, they should be sober and watchful. “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity preventeth a multitude of sins” (Joseph Smith Translation, 1 Peter 4:8).

In the fifth and final chapter of the first epistle, a passage of profound significance, the members are counseled tenderly: “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Peter 5:6–7). The New Jerusalem Bible renders this: “Bow down, then, before the power of God now, so that he may raise you up in due time; unload all your burden on to him, since he is concerned about you.” Or, as paraphrased in Eugene Peterson’s *The Message*: “So be content with who you are, and don’t put on airs. God’s strong hand is on you; he’ll promote you at the right time. Live carefree before God; he is most careful with you.”⁴

In the tenth verse of this final chapter, Peter provides a summation of the means by which weak and fallen men and women are made right with God, are made whole, and are established and grounded in the faith: “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Peter 5:10).

Like Precious Faith

As we turn our attention to Second Peter, it is fascinating that the senior Apostle begins his letter by addressing himself to “*them that have obtained like precious faith with us* through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1; emphasis added). *Like precious faith*. Those who have come out of the world by covenant, who have been baptized and become members

of the household of faith, these have acquired the same kind of faith as the Apostles. There is not one gospel for prophets and another for the rank and file of the church. No, theirs is a like precious faith, the faith that is centered in the Lord Jesus Christ, the faith that trusts totally in, has complete confidence in, and relies wholly upon the Savior. This is the faith that enables one to move steadily through the vicissitudes of life, to make decisions based on gospel priorities, the faith that empowers one to overcome every temptation of the devil (see Alma 37:33), the faith that leads to life and salvation. Such faith brings an actual knowledge that the course one is pursuing in life is according to the divine will,⁵ which knowledge is accompanied by “exceeding great and precious promises.” And it is by receiving these promises, the peace in this world that is a forerunner of the ultimate peace associated with eternal life in the world to come (D&C 59:23), that the faithful begin to become partakers of the divine nature.

Peter then reports that the fruits that flow from such faith are endowments of the Spirit that represent the Christlike character, the character of one who has begun to enjoy what Paul described as the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22–25). Peter mentions virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. A modern revelation teaches that such qualities ought to be found in the hearts and lives of those who aspire to teach the gospel and bring people into the faith (D&C 4:5–6). Respected New Testament scholar N. T. Wright translated this passage: “So, because of this, *you should strain every nerve to supplement your faith with virtue*, and your virtue with knowledge,” and so on (The Kingdom New Testament; emphasis added). Perhaps a word or two about each of these qualities or attributes would be helpful.

Virtue is a condition of uprightness, moral excellence, goodness, and a life that demonstrates consistency with truth or with the way things really are (Jacob 4:13; D&C 93:24).

Knowledge is vital because one cannot be saved in ignorance (D&C 131:6) and because a saving conviction is always predicated upon propositions of truth. We cannot live consistent with that which we do not know, nor can we endure faithfully to the end when we do not understand that which requires our lifetime loyalty.

Temperance is self-control. It was Jesus himself who taught, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). It is the meek person who is restrained, not alone by social prohibitions but, more importantly, through *temperance*, or self-control.

Patience is that virtue, that Godlike quality that demonstrates one's trust in God's program, trust in the Lord's purposes, and acquiescence to the divine timetable. To have patience is to have hope, to be willing to wait upon the Lord.

Godliness is a quality of a man or woman who has yielded his or her heart unto God (see Helaman 3:35), a believer whose genuine piety is reflected in his or her willing conformity to divine law.

Brotherly kindness is more than nice and attractive; it is a fundamental and vital feature of the outworking of the Spirit of Jesus Christ in our lives. One of the ways we assess our growth unto godliness is the extent to which we have begun to value the children of God, to love our brothers and sisters. Christianity is only partially about individual transformation and personal salvation; it is also concerned with community and corporate growth, how and in what manner we have come to treasure and respect humanity.

Charity, the pure love of Christ, is of course the highest of all spiritual gifts, the grandest of all heavenly endowments, and that "more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31; Ether 12:11). It was Mormon who taught us that true followers of Christ are those who have become by spiritual regeneration the sons and daughters of God, persons who have been lifted, purified, and transformed by this sacred love into the image of Christ. These will see the returning King for who he is, for they will be like him (Moroni 7:47-48).

Truly, as Peter states, a man or woman who possesses these qualities and gifts is neither "barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," while the person who lacks them is "blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (2 Peter 1:8-9). That is, the Saint who manifests such attributes is not idle, is not unprofitable; rather, he or she is alive, spiritually productive, contributing regularly and meaningfully to the life of the church of God and the betterment of God's world. On the other hand, one who lacks such qualities is living as though there had been no redemption made (see Moroni 7:38); he or she has a warped perspective on life, views things through the lenses of the natural man, is self-absorbed, is spiritually myopic, and has little sensitivity to sacred things. Such persons cannot see the distant scene.

Note that Peter observes that a member of the church who enjoys this character is fruitful "in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8). Such a person is enjoying both the cleansing and enabling powers of the Atonement and is experiencing the enlivening companionship of the Holy Spirit, which is the midwife of such spiritual traits. It is by the blood that we are sanctified from sin and by the medium of the Lord's Spirit that we grow in spiritual graces and in our

relationship with God and man. In writing of one who has undergone this mighty change of heart, Elder Parley P. Pratt explained:

His mind is quickened, his intellectual faculties are aroused to intense activity. He is, as it were, illuminated. He learns more of divine truth in a few days than he could have learned in a lifetime in the best merely human institutions in the world.

His affections are also purified, exalted, and increased in proportion. He loves his Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ with a perfect love. He also loves the members of the church, or the body of Christ, as he loves his own soul; while his bosom swells with the tenderest sympathies and emotions of good will and benevolence for all mankind. He would make any sacrifice that might be expedient to do good. He would lay down his life most cheerfully, without one moment's hesitation or regret, if required of him by the cause of truth.⁶

It was Paul, Peter's apostolic colleague, who wrote so eloquently of the transformation of his own soul following his conversion to Christ and Christianity: "But what things were gain to me [before conversion], those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and *I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: *That I may know him*, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Philippians 3:7–10; emphasis added). Indeed, the knowledge that matters, the knowledge that settles and sanctifies the human heart, and the knowledge that prompts purity and motivates one to selfless service, is the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of all humankind; that through him and him alone, we are able to be delivered from sin and death and hell and endless torment; that there is no weakness he cannot turn to strength, no emptiness he cannot fill, no sickness that the great physician cannot heal. Again quoting Paul, "thanks be to God, [who gives] us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Called and Elected

Having spoken of the need to become partakers of the divine nature, the need to acquire the fruit of the Spirit that produces Christlike character, Peter then counsels

us: “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:10–11). These are difficult words, particularly as they have been rendered in the King James Version. Alternate translations of “Wherefore the rather, brethren” include: “All the more reason, brethren” (Revised English Bible) or “Be all the more eager to confirm your call and election” (New Revised Standard Version) or “Be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure” (New International Version). That is to say, “Don’t be shortsighted or spiritually vacuous, but instead do all within your power to make your calling and election sure.”

The words *calling* and *election* are often used interchangeably. In scripture they tend to refer to a duty or an assignment, a responsibility within God’s kingdom. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained:

To be called is to be a member of the Church and kingdom of God on earth; it is to be numbered with the saints; it is to accept the gospel and receive the everlasting covenant. . . .

It is to be born again; to be a son or a daughter of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . ; it is to have a conditional promise of eternal life; it is to be an inheritor of all of the blessings of the gospel, provided there is continued obedience to the laws and ordinances thereof.

The Lord’s calls are the result of foreordination and grow out of faithfulness in the [premortal existence]. . . . That is, the saints were foreordained in the councils of eternity to believe the truth, to be sanctified, and to save their souls; and then in this life they are called to that gospel whereby these eternal promises can be fulfilled. . . . And if by a long course of trial and obedience, while yet in this life, a man proves to the Lord that he has and will abide in the truth, the Lord accepts the exhibited devotion and issues his decree that the promised blessings shall be received. The calling, which up to that time was provisional, is then made sure. The receipt of the promised blessings is no longer conditional; they are guaranteed. Announcement is made that every gospel blessing shall be inherited. . . .

To have one’s calling and election made sure is to be sealed up unto eternal life; it is to have the unconditional guarantee of exaltation in the highest heaven of the celestial world; it is to receive the assurance of godhood; it is, in effect, to have the day of judgment advanced.⁷

In other words, the Apostle Peter pointed the minds of the former-day Saints toward their eternal possibilities. He encouraged them, knowing of trying times which lay ahead as they moved toward the end of the age, the end of the dispensation. In the words of Paul, Peter charged them to “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). Would they make mistakes after receiving the assurance of salvation? Of course they would. Would they sin? Yes, for no person, save the Lord Jesus, has walked this earth and remained free from sin. While the inclination to commit serious sin will generally have been banished from the soul of such a righteous man or woman (see, for example, Mosiah 5:2; Alma 13:12; 19:33), yet the pull of the flesh will remain as long as we reside on a celestial earth.

President Brigham Young asked:

Will sin be perfectly destroyed? No, it will not, for it is not so designed in the economy of heaven. . . . Do not suppose that we shall ever in the flesh be free from temptations to sin. Some suppose that they can in the flesh be sanctified body and spirit and become so pure that they will never again feel the effects of the power of the adversary of truth. Were it possible for a person to attain to this degree of perfection in the flesh, he could not die neither remain in a world where sin predominates. . . . I think we should more or less feel the effects of sin so long as we live, and finally have to pass the ordeals of death.⁸

Consequently, persons who have made their calling and election sure to eternal life are required to be vigilant, humble, and dependent upon the Lord for spiritual protection, and to strive to be true to their covenants until they pass through the veil and are safely dead!

As President Young said on another occasion: “It requires all the atonement of Christ, the mercy of the Father, the pity of angels and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with us always, and then to do the very best we possibly can, to get rid of this sin within us, so that we may escape from this world into the celestial kingdom.”⁹

In a revelation given at the time of the organization of the restored church, we learn, “And we know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true; and we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength.” Now note this warning: “But *there is a possibility that man may fall from grace* and depart from the living God; therefore

let the church take heed and pray always, lest they fall into temptation; yea, and even let those who are sanctified take heed also” (D&C 20:30–34; emphasis added).

The Presbyterians in Joseph Smith’s day taught that one could not fall from grace and that once salvation was received, it could not be lost. The Methodists taught, on the other hand, that one could in fact fall from grace and be renewed and restored. Joseph taught that the fulness of truth took a road between them both—that in general while people could fall from grace and repent, there was a sin, known as the unpardonable sin or sin against the Holy Ghost, against which even the supernal power of Elijah could not seal an individual.¹⁰ The message is clear: every living soul, no matter the spiritual heights to which he or she may have ascended, must endure in faith until the end. Those who have passed the tests of mortality are forgiven of their sins through repentance, just like all of God’s children. While much is required of those who have gained the supernal assurance of exaltation (see D&C 82:3), all of humankind are saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel (see Articles of Faith 1:3; see also D&C 82:3).¹¹

In this context Peter adds that “an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:11). To say this another way, “For if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom” (English Standard Version). Or, “For in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you” (New Revised Standard Version). Or, “you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom” (New International Version).

In summary, we are speaking here of what Paul called the “hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2), being made sure, made solid, made secure. We are reminded of the marvelous words of the Prophet Joseph when he taught: “After a person hath faith in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized for the remission of his sins and receives the Holy Ghost (by the laying on of hands), . . . then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering and thirsting after Righteousness, and living by every word of God, and the Lord will soon say unto him, Son, thou shalt be exalted. When the Lord has thoro[ugh]ly proved him, and finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazards, then the man will find his calling and Election made sure.”¹²

The More Sure Word

The senior Apostle then turns himself to testimony. He alludes to the fact that he knows he will soon “put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me” (2 Peter 1:14). He then bears witness of the message of the

gospel, that Jesus of Nazareth is all that the prophets said he would be, and that he is indeed the Lord of glory: “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16). That is, “We are not making all of this up. This is not some devious and fictitious sham.” We “were not following cleverly devised myths. Rather, we were eyewitnesses of his grandeur” (Kingdom New Testament). Peter then makes reference to the transcendent experience he and James and John had enjoyed with the Savior on the Mount of Transfiguration some six months before the Crucifixion: “For [Christ] received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount” (2 Peter 1:17–18).

Christians have generally viewed the Transfiguration as a display of “a new and greater Moses,” a reminder of the baptism of Jesus where that same voice was heard, and a foreshadowing of the glory their Master would receive in the Resurrection.¹³ Christian pastor and theologian John MacArthur has written:

The Jesus who had been living for over thirty years in ordinary human form was now partially seen in the blazing effulgence of God (compare Hebrews 1:1–3). From within himself, in a way that defies full description, much less full explanation, Jesus’ divine glory was manifested before Peter, James, and John.

Here is the greatest confirmation of his deity yet in the life of Jesus. Here, more than on any other occasion, Jesus revealed Himself as He truly is, the Son of God. . . . As with the Shekinah manifestations of the Old Testament, God here portrayed Himself to human eyes in a form of light so dazzling and overwhelming that it could barely be withstood.

MacArthur added, “That awesome experience was but a foretaste of the day in which ‘the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels’ (Matthew 16:27).”¹⁴

Latter-day Saints have received additional insights pertaining to what took place on the mount. We know from modern revelation and prophetic teaching that Peter, James, and John—the meridian First Presidency—were granted a most unusual vision of the future. The Savior declared in August 1831, “Nevertheless, he that endureth in faith and doeth my will, the same shall overcome, and shall receive an inheritance upon the earth when the day of transfiguration shall

come”—at the Second Coming, when the earth will be changed, lifted to a terrestrial condition—“when the earth shall be transfigured, even according to the pattern which was shown unto mine apostles upon the mount; of which account the fulness ye have not yet received” (D&C 63:20–21).

Joseph Smith explained, “The Savior, Moses, and Elias gave the keys to Peter, James, and John, on the mount, when they were transfigured before him”—that is, when the three Apostles were also transfigured with their Lord.¹⁵ We would presume that these keys were the same as those conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple on April 3, 1836 (D&C 110:11–16). Further, President Joseph Fielding Smith has suggested that it was on the mount that the chief Apostles received what we would know today as the temple endowment.¹⁶

Finally, James Burgess reported that the Prophet Joseph made the following comments in a sermon in Nauvoo on August 27, 1843: “Men will set up stakes and say thus far will we go and no farther. Did Abraham when [he was] called upon to offer his son? And did the Savior? No. View [the Savior] fulfilling all righteousness again on the banks of Jordan. Also, *on the Mount transfigured before Peter and John, there receiving the fulness of priesthood* or the law of God, setting up no stake but coming right up to the mark in all things.”¹⁷ According to Wilford Woodruff’s journal, the Prophet said, “If a man gets a fullness of the priesthood of God he has to get it in the same way that Jesus obtained it, and that was by keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord.”¹⁸

Peter testified, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). When the Prophet Joseph Smith was engaged in his inspired translation of the King James Bible, he altered this verse as follows: “We have therefore *a more sure knowledge of the word of prophecy*, to which word of prophecy ye do well that ye take heed” (emphasis added). Now there is no question but that Peter and his apostolic colleagues understood, through supernal and ineffable experience with the Master, “the word of prophecy,” what we call the spirit of revelation, and that those within the faith who were less seasoned in utilizing or comprehending the gifts of the Spirit, and particularly the gift of prophecy, were well advised to look to those acknowledged prophets, seers, and revelators as both mentors and interpreters. It seems clear that the Prophet Joseph did not, at this early stage of his spiritual development (between 1832 and 1833),¹⁹ understand the doctrine of calling and election and the more sure word of prophecy. Like all of the Saints of God, the choice seer grew in understanding and experience line upon line, precept upon precept.²⁰

In May of 1843, a decade after his inspired translation of 2 Peter, Brother Joseph declared, “The more sure word of prophecy means a man’s knowing that he is sealed up unto eternal life, by revelation and the spirit of prophecy, through the power of the Holy Priesthood. It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance” (D&C 131:5–6). Also,

Notwithstanding the apostle exhorts them to add to their faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, etc., yet he exhorts them to make their calling and election sure. And though they had heard an audible voice from heaven bearing testimony that Jesus was the Son of God, yet he says we have a more sure word or prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed as unto a light shining in a dark place. Now, wherein could they have a more sure word of prophecy than to hear the voice of God saying, This is my beloved Son?

Now for the secret and grand key. Though they might hear the voice of God and know that Jesus was the Son of God, this would be no evidence that their election and calling was made sure, that they had part with Christ, and were joint heirs with him. They then would want that more sure word of prophecy, that they were sealed in the heavens and had the promise of eternal life in the kingdom of God. Then, having this promise sealed unto them, it was an anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast.

He then added that “this hope and knowledge would support the soul in every hour of trial, trouble and tribulation.” The Prophet then made a statement that clarifies and expands upon Peter’s words—that having acquired faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly love, and charity we become fruitful “in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:8): “Then knowledge through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the grand key that unlocks the glories and mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.”²¹ Knowledge of anything that is “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy” (Articles of Faith 1:13) is worthwhile and commendable, but the knowledge about which Peter and Joseph Smith are speaking is the knowledge that saves, the knowledge that one’s course in life is pleasing to God and that one will go on to eternal life and exaltation. Joseph Smith beckons to us: “Then I would exhort you to go on and continue to call upon God until you make your calling and election sure for yourselves, by obtaining this more sure word of prophecy, and wait patiently for the promise until you obtain it.”²²

Conclusion

In reflecting on this glorious doctrine, we might ask, “Is this something we should desire or seek for?” In response, who among us, living in a fallen world filled with disappointment, distress, and hopelessness, does not long to know that our lives are acceptable to God, that we are on course and will one day inherit a better world? As Elder McConkie has written: “Among those who have received the gospel, and who are seeking diligently to live its laws and gain eternal life, there is an instinctive and determined desire to make their calling and election sure. Because they have tasted the good things of God and sipped from the fountain of eternal truth, they now seek the divine presence, where they shall know all things, have all power, all might, and all dominion, and in fact be like Him who is the great Prototype of all saved beings—God our Heavenly and Eternal Father (see D&C 132:20). This is the end objective, the chief goal of all the faithful, and there is nothing greater in all eternity, ‘for there is no gift greater than the gift of salvation’” (D&C 6:13).²³

King Benjamin offered this timeless counsel: “Therefore, 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, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all” (Mosiah 5:15; emphasis added). Steadfast and immovable—those are the key words, for they are the scriptural description of balance and spiritual stability.

It was while wrestling with his assignment as a new and inexperienced priesthood leader and struggling to know how best to assist those who were in transgression, that Alma the Elder, a good man who “feared that he should do wrong in the sight of God,” poured out his heart in prayer to God. Alma was commended for choosing to respond affirmatively to the power and invitation of Abinadi’s words, for being willing to repent of his sins, and be a part of the church of Jesus Christ. “Thou art my servant,” the Lord stated, “and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life” (Mosiah 26:13–20). We note that Alma was not seeking to be truer than true when this glorious assurance came to him. He was not on a calling and election crusade. Rather, he was busily engaged in doing his duty, striving with all his heart to bless, lift, and strengthen his brothers and sisters. There’s a message there for us.

We must be willing to come to that point of personal commitment where whatever the Lord calls upon us to do, we will do. Such unconditional surrender of self is always prerequisite to gaining the ultimate victory. The Prophet

and the early brethren taught that only by being willing to sacrifice all things, including our own life if necessary, can we gain the actual knowledge that our course in life is in harmony with the heavens. Thus “a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation. . . . It was through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life; and it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God.”²⁴ In short, the Lord essentially asks us, “Do you want me to give you all that I have?” We of course respond positively. And then the Savior answers, “Then be willing to give me all that you have.”

It is worthwhile to read how and why Joseph Smith himself received the assurance of eternal life. The Lord addressed his modern seer: “For I am the Lord thy God, and will be with thee even unto the end of the world, and through all eternity; for verily *I seal upon you your exaltation*, and prepare a throne for you in the kingdom of my Father, with Abraham your father. Behold, *I have seen your sacrifices*, and will forgive all your sins; I have seen your sacrifices in obedience to that which I have told you” (D&C 132:49–50; emphasis added; compare D&C 97:8).

Surely there are few things more important in this life than striving to live in such a manner as to always enjoy companionship with the Holy Ghost. The clearer are our views, the more we will make it a priority never to do anything that would cost us the influence of that Holy Spirit. It is that Spirit that testifies, that confirms, that informs and inspires, and that sanctifies. And it is that Spirit that brings peace (see D&C 6:23). In August of 1831 the Lord counseled the early Saints to “learn that he who doeth the works of righteousness shall receive his reward, even peace in this world, and eternal life in the world to come” (D&C 59:23). In this light, President Marion G. Romney explained, “The fulness of eternal life is not attainable in mortality, but *the peace which is its harbinger and which comes as a result of making one’s calling and election sure is attainable in this life.*”²⁵

Latter-day Saints who have received the ordinances of salvation—including the blessings of the temple—may press forward in the work of the Lord and with quiet dignity and patient maturity seek to be worthy of gaining the certain assurance of salvation before the end of their mortal lives. But should one not formally receive the more sure word of prophecy in this life, he or she has the scriptural promise that faithfully enduring to the end—keeping the covenants and commandments from baptism to the end of their lives (see Mosiah 18:8–9)—leads one to the promise of eternal life, whether that promise be received here or hereafter (see D&C 14:7; 53:7; 2 Nephi 31:20; Mosiah 5:15). “But blessed

are they who are faithful and endure, whether in life or in death, for they shall inherit eternal life” (D&C 50:5). God grant that such will be our sweet privilege and our supernal blessing.

Notes

1. William Clayton diary, May 17, 1843.
2. See *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 75–76, 7:9.
3. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 178; emphasis added.
4. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 2216.
5. See *Lectures on Faith*, 67–69, 6:2–7.
6. Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 59–60.
7. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–73), 3:326, 327–28, 330–31.
8. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 10:173; emphasis added.
9. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:301.
10. Joseph Smith, *Millennial Star*, February 9, 1861, 88.
11. Citing the Apostle Paul (see Hebrews 10:26) and the Prophet Joseph Smith, Elder McConkie points out that those who have made their calling and election sure who then become guilty of serious sin “must then pay the penalty of their own sins, for the blood of Christ will not cleanse them.” More specifically, those who commit adultery or murder break the seal and go to the telestial kingdom, while those who commit the unpardonable sin break the seal and become sons of perdition (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 3:343; *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985], 232; Wilford Woodruff Journal, March 10, 1844, 2:363).
12. History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 (2 November 1838–31 July 1842), <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842?locale=eng&p=542>; <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842?locale=eng&p=544>.
13. See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–97), 2:687.
14. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary—Matthew*, 3 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985–89), 3:63–64.
15. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 9.
16. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols., comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 2:165, 170; see also Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 1:400.
17. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 246; punctuation supplied.

18. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 307.
19. See Robert J. Matthews, *A Plainer Translation: Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible, A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 96.
20. Other examples of alterations in the King James text that indicate that Joseph did not grasp, at the time of the translation, what he would understand and teach in later years, including the JST of Hebrews 11:40 and the JST of Revelation 1:5–6.
21. B. H. Roberts, *The Rise and Fall of Nauvoo* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1900), 214.
22. *Millennial Star*, January 29, 1859, 76.
23. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 3:325.
24. *Lectures on Faith*, 69, 6:7.
25. Marion G. Romney, in Conference Report, October 1965; in *Look to God and Live* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 125–26; emphasis added.