

The royal law of love is of sacred significance in the Lord's program for his people—an element as vital as any other in the gospel. It is inseparable from them and the spirit of them. It is well known to us institutionally; indeed, the Church to which we have the honor to belong is celebrated for knowing and acting upon it on occasions of great need across the earth.

My purpose this morning has been, in these few words, to honor that commandment and those who do so well personally to accept his invitation to impart

to others "both temporally and spiritually according to their needs" (Mosiah 18:29).

That we may do so, I humbly pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

President Monson

Elder Marion D. Hanks, a member of the Presidency of the First Quorum of the Seventy, has spoken to us.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, will now address us.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks

A penetrating question

"What think ye of Christ?" (Matthew 22:42). That question is as penetrating today as when Jesus used it to confound the Pharisees almost two thousand years ago. Like a sword, sharp and powerful, it uncovers what is hidden, divides truth from error, and goes to the heart of religious belief.

Here are some answers being given today.

Some praise Jesus Christ as the greatest teacher who ever lived, but deny that he is Messiah, Savior, or Redeemer. Some prominent theologians teach that our secularized world needs "a new concept of God, stripped of the . . . supernatural." They believe that "not even a suffering God can help to solve the pain and tragedy of modern man" (John A. Hardon, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1971], pp. 356, 359.)

A bishop in one Christian denomination has declared that "Jesus was in every sense a human being, just as we are" ("One Clergyman's Views on the 'Death of God,'" *U.S. News and World Report*, 18 Apr. 1966, p. 57).

Under the influence of such teachings, the religion of many is like the creed of the humanists, who declare that "no deity will save us; we must save ourselves" (*The Encyclopedia of American*

Religions: Religious Creeds, 1st ed., ed. J. Gordon Melton [Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1973], p. 641).

Another church that claims roots in "Christianity" maintains that Jesus' crucifixion was not the fulfillment of his mission, but evidence of its failure. They teach that he did not cleanse men of original sin, but that another messiah must come to complete our salvation and establish the kingdom of heaven on earth. (See *Outline of the Principle, Level 4* [New York: Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity], pp. 159-71, 199-214.)

We are Christians

Many years ago a young Latter-day Saint enrolled in a midwestern university and applied for a scholarship only available to Christians. Both the applicant and the university officials were unsure whether a Mormon was eligible. After consulting a panel of theologians, they concluded that this Mormon was a Christian.

When I first heard of that event over thirty years ago, I was shocked that anyone, especially a member of our church, would entertain any doubt that we are Christians. I have come to a better understanding of that confusion. I think we sometimes thoughtlessly give others cause to wonder. How does this happen?

Simple gospel truths are important

For many years I was a teacher of law. A frequent teaching method in that discipline is to concentrate classroom instruction on the difficult questions—the obscure and debatable matters that lie at the fringes of learning. Some law teachers believe that the simple general rules that answer most legal questions are so obvious that students can learn them by independent study. As a result, these teachers devote little time to teaching the basics.

I believe some of us sometimes do the same thing in gospel teaching. We neglect to teach and testify to some simple, basic truths of paramount importance. This omission permits some members and nonmembers to get wrong ideas about our faith and belief.

Jesus is our Creator and Savior

What do members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints think of Christ?

Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of God the Eternal Father. He is our Creator. He is our Teacher. He is our Savior. His atonement paid for the sin of Adam and won victory over death, assuring resurrection and immortality for all men.

He is all of these, but he is more. Jesus Christ is the Savior, whose atoning sacrifice opens the door for us to be cleansed of our personal sins so that we can be readmitted to the presence of God. He is our Redeemer.

Biblical testimonies of the Atonement

The Messiah's atoning sacrifice is the central message of the prophets of all ages. It was prefigured by the animal sacrifices prescribed by the law of Moses, whose whole meaning, one prophet explained, "point[ed] to that great and last sacrifice [of] the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal" (Alma 34:14). The Atonement was promised and predicted by the Old Testament prophets. Isaiah declared:

"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: . . . and with his stripes we are healed.

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

"He was . . . brought as a lamb to the slaughter. . . .

" . . . He was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken. . . .

" . . . He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:5–8, 12).

At the beginning of the Savior's ministry, John the Baptist exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

At the end of his ministry, as Jesus blessed the cup and gave it to his disciples, he said, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). As Latter-day Saints partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we drink water in remembrance of his blood, which was shed for us (see D&C 20:79).

The writers of the New Testament teach that our Savior's suffering and his blood atoned for our sins.

The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians that the first principle of the gospel he preached to them was "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). And to the Colossians he wrote, "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14; see also Hebrews 2:17, 10:10).

Peter described how Christ "bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

John wrote that "the blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7; see also 2:2, 3:5, 4:10).

We revere the Bible. And so we and our fellow believers in Christ sing these words from that inspiring hymn "How Great Thou Art":

And when I think that God, his Son
not sparing,
Sent him to die, I scarce can take it
in,
That on the cross my burden gladly
bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin.
(*Hymns* [1985], no. 86)

Need for the Book of Mormon

Although the Bible's explanation of atonement for individual sins should be unmistakable, that doctrine has been misunderstood by many who have only the Bible to explain it.

Modern prophets declare that the Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the everlasting gospel in greater clarity than any other scripture (see D&C 20:8-9; 27:5). In a day when many are challenging the divinity of Jesus Christ or doubting the reality of his atonement and resurrection, the message of that second witness, the Book of Mormon, is needed more urgently than ever.

President Ezra Taft Benson has reminded us again and again that the Book of Mormon "was written for our day" and that it "is the keystone in our witness of Jesus Christ" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1986, pp. 4, 5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, pp. 5, 6). I believe that the reason our Heavenly Father has had his prophet direct us into a more intensive study of the Book of Mormon is that this generation needs its message more than any of its forebears. As President Benson has said, the Book of Mormon "provides the most complete explanation of the doctrine of the Atonement," and "its testimony of the Master is clear, undiluted, and full of power" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1986, p. 4; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1986, p. 5).

Heresies about Jesus Christ

In contrast, what is called "liberal theology" teaches that Jesus Christ is important not because he atoned for our sins, but only because he taught us the way to come to God by perfecting ourselves. In this theology, human beings can be reconciled to God entirely through

their own righteousness. (See O. Kendall White, Jr., *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987], pp. 43-44.)

Another group—secular rather than religious—believes that Jesus was not God, that man is God, and that you can create your own destiny through the powers of your own mind. (See "Age-old Fear of New Age Concerns," *Insight*, 11 July 1988, p. 55.)

Man cannot earn salvation

Are Latter-day Saints susceptible to such heresies? The Apostle Paul wrote that we should "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Could that familiar expression mean that the sum total of our own righteousness will win us salvation and exaltation? Could some of us believe that our heavenly parentage and our divine destiny allow us to pass through mortality and attain eternal life solely on our own merits?

On the basis of what I have heard, I believe that some of us, some of the time, say things that can create that impression. We can forget that keeping the commandments, which is necessary, is not sufficient. As Nephi said, we must labor diligently to persuade everyone "to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Nephi 25:23).

In his famous poem "Invictus," William Ernest Henley hurled man's challenge against Fate. With head "bloody, but unbowed," determined man is unconquerable. The last verse reads:

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate.
I am the captain of my soul.
(In *Out of the Best Books*, 5 vols.,
ed. Bruce B. Clark and Robert K.
Thomas [Salt Lake City: Deseret
Book Co., 1968], 4:93)

Writing a half-century later, Elder Orson F. Whitney replied with these lines:

Art thou in truth? Then what of him
Who bought thee with his blood?
Who plunged into devouring seas
And snatched thee from the flood?

Who bore for all our fallen race
What none but him could bear.—
The God who died that man might
live,
And endless glory share?

Of what avail thy vaunted strength,
Apart from his vast might?
Pray that his Light may pierce the
gloom,
That thou mayest see aright.

Men are as bubbles on the wave,
As leaves upon the tree.
Thou, captain of thy soul, forsooth!
Who gave that place to thee?

Free will is thine—free agency,
To wield for right or wrong;
But thou must answer unto him
To whom all souls belong.

Bend to the dust that head
“unbowed,”
Small part of Life’s great whole!
And see in him, and him alone,
The Captain of thy soul.
(*Improvement Era*, May 1926,
p. 611)

Man unquestionably has impressive powers and can bring to pass great things by tireless efforts and indomitable will. But after all our obedience and good works, we cannot be saved from the effect of our sins without the grace extended by the atonement of Jesus Christ.

Book of Mormon clarifies doctrines

The Book of Mormon puts us right. It teaches that “salvation doth not come by the law alone” (Mosiah 13:28); that is, salvation does not come by keeping the commandments alone. “By the law no flesh is justified” (2 Nephi 2:5). Even those who serve God with their whole souls are unprofitable servants (see Mosiah 2:21). Man cannot earn his own salvation.

The Book of Mormon teaches, “Since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself” (Alma 22:14). “There can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world” (Alma 34:12; see also 2 Nephi 9:7, Alma 34:8–16). “Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; . . . he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law” (2 Nephi 2:6–7). And so we “preach of Christ . . . that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26).

In the Book of Mormon the Savior explains the gospel, including the Atonement and its relationship to repentance, baptism, works of righteousness, and the ultimate judgment:

“My Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross, . . . that I might draw all men unto me, . . . that they may be judged according to their works. And . . . whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world” (3 Nephi 27:14–16).

In that same teaching the Savior restates these principles in a way that emphasizes our everlasting reliance on the Atonement worked out by the shedding of his blood:

“And no unclean thing can enter into [the Father’s] 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” (3 Nephi 27:19).

Joseph Smith stated this same relationship in our third article of faith: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”

Atonement is inexplicable but true

Why is Christ the only way? How was it possible for him to take upon him-

self the sins of all mankind? Why was it necessary for his blood to be shed? And how can our soiled and sinful selves be cleansed by his blood?

These are mysteries I do not understand. To me, as to President John Taylor, the miracle of the atonement of Jesus Christ is "incomprehensible and inexplicable" (see *The Mediation and Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News Co., 1882], pp. 148–49). But the Holy Ghost has given me a witness of its truthfulness, and I rejoice that I can spend my life in proclaiming it.

Testimony of Jesus Christ

I testify with the ancient and modern prophets that there is no other name and no other way under heaven by which man can be saved except by Jesus Christ (see Acts 4:10, 12; 2 Nephi 25:20; Alma 38:9; D&C 18:23).

I witness with the prophet Lehi that "there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah" (2 Nephi 2:8).

I testify with the prophet Alma that no man can be saved except he is cleansed from all stain, through the blood of Jesus Christ (see Alma 5:21). As he explains, "repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment" (Alma 42:16), and "therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice" (Alma 42:15).

I witness with the prophets of the Book of Mormon that the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel, suffered "according to the flesh" (Alma 7:13), the pains, the infirmities, and the griefs and sorrows of every living creature in the family of Adam (see 2 Nephi 9:21, Alma 7:12–13, Mosiah 14:4, D&C 18:11).

I testify that when the Savior suffered and died for all men, all men became subject unto him (see 2 Nephi 9:5) and to his commandment that all must repent and be baptized in his name, having faith in him, "or they cannot be saved in

the kingdom of God" (2 Nephi 9:23; see also Alma 11:40; John 3:5, 8:24).

We must repent to be saved

Speaking through the Prophet Joseph Smith in our dispensation, the Savior said: "I am . . . Christ the Lord, . . . the Redeemer of the world.

"I [have] accomplished and finished the will of him whose I am, even the Father, concerning me—having done this that I might subdue all things unto myself—

"Retaining all power, even to . . . judging every man according to his works and the deeds which he hath done.

"And surely every man must repent or suffer, for I, God, am endless. . . .

"Wherefore, I command you to repent. . . .

"For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

"But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I" (D&C 19:1–4, 13, 16–17).

Salvation is through Christ's blood

What think we of Christ? As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we testify with the Book of Mormon prophet-king Benjamin that "there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent,

"For behold, . . . salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ" (Mosiah 3:17–18).

And as we repent of our sins and seek to keep his commandments and our covenants, we cry out, as Benjamin's people cried out, "O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins" (Mosiah 4:2).

In all of this, we remember and rely on the Lord's sure word: "Keep my commandments in all things.

"And, if you keep my commandments and endure to the end you shall have eternal life, which gift is the greatest of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14:6-7). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

The choir sang "Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah" without announcement.

President Monson

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, a member of the Council of the Twelve Apostles, has just addressed us, followed by the Tabernacle Choir singing "Guide Us, O Thou Great Jehovah."

President Ezra Taft Benson has suggested that I be the concluding speaker at this session.

President Thomas S. Monson

Happiness—the object of our existence

I pray for the Spirit of the Lord to be with me. "Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God" (Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1938], pp. 255-56).

This description of such a universal goal was provided by the Prophet Joseph Smith. It was relevant then. It is relevant now. With such a clear road map to follow, why then are there so many unhappy people? Frequently, frowns outnumber smiles and despair dampens joy. We live so far below the level of our divine possibilities. Some become confused by materialism, entangled by sin, and lost among the passing parade of humanity. Others cry out in the words of the convert of Philip of old: "How can I [find my way], except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:31).

Happiness is found at home

Happiness does not consist of a glut of luxury, the world's idea of a "good time." Nor must we search for it in faraway places with strange-sounding names. Happiness is found at home.

All of us remember the home of our childhood. Interestingly, our thoughts do

not dwell on whether the house was large or small, the neighborhood fashionable or downtrodden. Rather, we delight in the experiences we shared as a family. The home is the laboratory of our lives, and what we learn there largely determines what we do when we leave there.

Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, prime minister of Great Britain, expressed the profound philosophy: "The family is the building block of society. It is a nursery, a school, a hospital, a leisure centre, a place of refuge and a place of rest. It encompasses the whole of the society. It fashions our beliefs; it is the preparation for the rest of our life" (Nicholas Wood, "Thatcher Champions the Family," *The Times*, 26 May 1988, p. 24).

"Home is where the heart is." It *does* take "a heap o' livin'" to make a house a home (Edgar A. Guest, "Home," in *The Family Book of Best-Loved Poems*, ed. David L. George [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1952], p. 151). "Home, home, sweet, sweet home, Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home" (*Hymns* [1948], no. 185). We turn from the reverie of such pleasant recollections. We contemplate parents gone, family grown, childhood vanished. Slowly but surely we face the truth: We are responsible for the home we build. We must build wisely, for eternity is not a short voyage. There will be calm and wind, sunlight and shadows, joy and sorrow. But if we really try, our home can be a bit of heaven here on earth. The thoughts we think, the deeds we do, the lives we live influence not only the success of our