

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin

Christians in belief and action

My beloved brethren and sisters, it is a privilege for me to speak to you this afternoon, and I pray for that same Spirit that we've enjoyed so much during this conference.

Some people erroneously believe that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its members are not Christian. We have difficulty understanding why anyone could accept and promote an idea that is so far from the truth. President Gordon B. Hinckley has described Church members as a people "bound [together] by a common love for our Master, who is the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world. We are a covenant people who have taken upon ourselves His holy name."¹

Our beliefs and actions may differ from those of others, but we, as good Christians, do not criticize other religions or their adherents. "We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, *let them worship how, where, or what they may.*"²

A dictionary defines a Christian as "one who professes *belief* in Jesus as the Christ or follows the religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus" and "one who *lives* according to the teachings of Jesus."³ Thus two characteristics identify Christians: (1) they profess *belief* in the Savior, and (2) they *act* in harmony with the Savior's teachings. Faithful members of the Church, called Saints or Latter-day Saints, qualify clearly in both characteristics. In our belief and our action, we demonstrate that "Jesus Christ himself [is] the chief corner stone" of our faith.⁴

Christians in belief

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints bears His name. He stands at

its head and directs it through His chosen prophets.

We believe the *first principle of the gospel* is "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."⁵ "No [one] cometh unto the Father, but by [Him]."⁶ As His disciples, we echo boldly the words of Peter's resounding testimony to our Master: "Thou art the Christ."⁷ The burning witness of the Holy Spirit that we feel deep within our hearts prompts us to make this declaration humbly and gratefully. When we explain our regard for Jesus, we lovingly and plainly testify that He is "that Christ, the Son of the living God."⁸

We rejoice in our sure knowledge that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."⁹ With obedient hearts and eyes of faith, "we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God."¹⁰

We declare that Jesus is the First-born Son of our Heavenly Father in the spirit and the Only Begotten Son of God in mortality. He is a God, one of the three in the Godhead. He is the Savior and Redeemer of the human race. In a premortal council at which we were all present, He accepted our Father's great plan of happiness for His children and was chosen by the Father to give effect to that plan. He led the forces of good against those of Satan and his followers in a battle for the souls of men that began before this world was formed. That conflict continues today. We were all on the side of Jesus then. We are on the side of Jesus today.

The Atonement of Jesus Christ, an act of pure love, overcame the effects of the Fall and provided the way for all mankind to return to the presence of God. As part of the Atonement, the Savior overcame physical death and provided immortality for every one of God's

children through the Resurrection. He also overcame spiritual death and provided the possibility of eternal life, the life that God lives and the greatest of all the gifts of God. This He did by taking upon Himself the suffering for the sins of all humankind.

Under the direction of His Father, He created this world and many others. He came to this earth as the Son of God, the Eternal Father, and the mortal virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life. He had a greater effect upon the people of this world than any other who has ever lived or will live upon it. He "stands first, foremost, and alone, as a directing personality in the world's progression."¹¹ He was crucified and resurrected and ascended to His Father in Heaven. After His Resurrection, He ministered to people who lived in the Western Hemisphere.

After the great Apostasy, He initiated the Restoration of the gospel on a spring day in 1820 when He and His Father visited young Joseph Smith. The Lord directed the organization of His restored Church on 6 April 1830.

He will return in glory to reign in righteousness for 1,000 years, after which He will deliver the kingdom to His Father.¹²

Belief based on scriptures and revelation

We base our belief and conviction of the divine nature and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ on the holy scriptures and on continuing revelation to latter-day prophets.

"We believe the Bible to be the word of God."¹³ We delight in the knowledge of the Lord that we find recorded in the Old and New Testaments. We know that Jehovah of the Old Testament and Jesus of the New Testament are one and the same. We are grateful that this sacred record of God's dealings with the people of ancient Israel and of His mortal ministry has been preserved and passed to us

to enlighten our minds and strengthen our spirits. The fragmentary nature of the biblical record and the errors in it, resulting from multiple transcriptions, translations, and interpretations, do not diminish our belief in it as the word of God "as far as it is translated correctly."¹⁴ We read and study the Bible, we teach and preach from it, and we strive to live according to the eternal truths it contains. We love this collection of holy writ.

"We also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God."¹⁵ It is another testament of Jesus Christ, written "by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and of revelation . . . to the convincing of [all people] that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations."¹⁶ God brought forth the Book of Mormon as a second witness that corroborates and strengthens the Bible's testimony of the Savior. The Book of Mormon does not supplant the Bible. It expands, extends, clarifies, and amplifies our knowledge of the Savior. Surely this second witness should be cause for great rejoicing by all Christians.

We invite our friends who are not of our faith to read the Book of Mormon and ponder its content prayerfully. To them we offer this scriptural promise: "And now, my beloved brethren, . . . and all ye ends of the earth, hearken unto these words and believe in Christ; and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ. And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these words, for they are the words of Christ, and he hath given them unto me; and they teach all men that they should do good."¹⁷

Latter-day Saints "believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God."¹⁸ We feel blessed to know that God speaks to His children, as He has throughout the ages, through living prophets.¹⁹

God called, prepared, and sustained Joseph Smith, the Prophet of the Restoration. Prophets have no other purpose, no other mission except to serve God. Of his own sacred responsibility and holy calling, our living prophet, President Gordon B. Hinckley, has said: "I have no desire other than to do that which the Lord would have done. I am His servant, called to serve His people. This is His Church. We are only custodians of that which belongs to Him."²⁰

The Doctrine and Covenants also contains revelations in which "one hears the tender but firm voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, speaking anew in the dispensation of the fulness of times . . . in fulfillment of and in concert with the words of all the holy prophets since the world began."²¹

This book of revelations is "of great value to the human family and of more worth than the riches of the whole earth" because of "the testimony that is given of Jesus Christ—his divinity, his majesty, his perfection, his love, and his redeeming power."²²

The Pearl of Great Price provides the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the central figure in every dispensation from Adam to Joseph Smith and including President Gordon B. Hinckley.

Christians in action

To repeat, by definition a Christian not only professes *belief* in the Savior, but a Christian *lives and acts* according to the teachings and commandments of Jesus Christ. He taught, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that *doeth* the will of my Father."²³ Jesus also said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."²⁴ He commanded us to pattern our lives after His.²⁵ True disciples of the Lord must be "doers of the word, and not hearers only."²⁶

Our faith in the Lord moves us to the *second principle of the gospel*: repen-

tance.²⁷ We develop a desire to purify and sanctify ourselves so that we might be worthy to return to God's presence. We learn of the great plan of happiness that our Father has designed for His children, and we seek the blessings of peace and joy that are linked irrevocably to obedience to the laws of God.²⁸ Through the marvelous power of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, a power activated by our obedience to His commandments, we can be washed clean of our sins. His infinite "mercy can satisfy the demands of justice"²⁹ for everyone who will repent. One of the great truths restored to the earth through modern revelation is that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is universal! The saving power of the gospel spans all generations of time and extends to all nations, kindreds, tongues, and peoples. Through humble repentance, we offer the sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit that the Lord requires of us before we can enter the waters of baptism.³⁰

Our faith in the Lord moves us to the *third principle of the gospel*, which is "baptism by immersion for the remission of sins" by one who has priesthood authority.³¹ The Savior commanded that we all must be born again: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."³² Latter-day Saints accept baptism as an essential saving ordinance that is required of all people. Through baptism we covenant to take upon us the Lord's name and honor it by keeping His commandments. He, in turn, promises us the guiding and enlightening presence of His Spirit. The *fourth principle of the gospel* is the "laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost."³³

Covenant to obey the commandments

As we take His name upon us, we most certainly are Christians, for we bear the name of Christ. Each week as we partake of the emblems of bread and water,

we do it in remembrance of Him. We renew our covenant that we “are willing to take upon [us] the name of [the] Son [of God], and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given [us].”³⁴

Through faith in the Lord, repentance, baptism, and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, we are born anew. We experience “a mighty change . . . in our hearts”³⁵ and become “quicken[ed] in the inner man.”³⁶ If we are faithful and obedient, this mighty change will cause that “we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.”³⁷

By obeying God’s commands, we deny ourselves of all ungodliness. Through obedience motivated by a wholehearted love of God, we come fully unto Christ and allow His grace, through the Atonement, to lead us into perfection.³⁸

Latter-day Saints covenant to keep the Lord’s commandments. Though we may fall short, our hearts are committed to striving earnestly to be obedient. We follow the teachings of the Savior. We try always to go the extra mile, to fast, to pray for our enemies, to care for the poor, and to do our acts of charity in private. We try to follow the example He gave in the parable of the good Samaritan. We avoid profanity. We avoid finding fault. We keep the Sabbath day holy and strive to be reconciled to our brother. With patience and forgiveness we try to turn the other cheek, knowing that we will be judged as we judge others. We are aware of the dangers of materialism and debt. We seek to put the kingdom of God and His righteousness first in our lives because we know that our hearts will follow what we treasure. We know that the gate is strait and the way is narrow, so we labor to develop self-discipline to follow in His footsteps.

We love our neighbors. We strive to treat others with courtesy and respect, to treat them as we would want to be treated, both in public settings and in our

homes. We strive to show concern for others and courtesy in all that we do—even as we drive in a traffic jam. We know that “out of small things proceedeth that which is great.”³⁹ Because we find joy in what we know and in how we live, we like to share the gospel with others.

“The author and finisher of our faith”

Can anyone doubt that Latter-day Saints profess a profound belief in Jesus Christ or doubt that we follow a religion based on the life and teachings of the Savior? He is, without question, “the author and finisher of our faith.”⁴⁰ President Hinckley gave this powerful testimony of our Redeemer:

“Towering above all mankind stands Jesus the Christ, the King of glory, the unblemished Messiah, the Lord Emmanuel. . . .

“He is our King, our Lord, our Master, the living Christ, who stands on the right hand of His Father. He lives! He lives, resplendent and wonderful, the living Son of the living God.”⁴¹

I add my personal testimony to others you have heard. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior and Redeemer of all mankind, our Mediator with the Father, and our perfect example. I love Him and serve Him and seek only to do His will. God lives, and He loves His children. The gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith. President Gordon B. Hinckley is the Lord’s chosen prophet today. I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 89; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 65.
2. Articles of Faith 1:11; italics added.
3. *The American Heritage Dictionary* (1992), “Christian,” 340; italics added.
4. Ephesians 2:20.
5. Articles of Faith 1:4.
6. John 14:6.

7. Mark 8:29.
8. John 6:69.
9. Acts 4:12.
10. Helaman 3:28.
11. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 3rd ed. (1916), 2.
12. See Revelation 20:6; Doctrine and Covenants 76:107–9.
13. Articles of Faith 1:8.
14. Articles of Faith 1:8.
15. Articles of Faith 1:8.
16. Title page, Book of Mormon.
17. 2 Nephi 33:10; see also Moroni 7:16.
18. Articles of Faith 1:9.
19. See Amos 3:7; Ephesians 4:11–14.
20. In Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 89; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 65.
21. Introduction to the Doctrine and Covenants.
22. Introduction to the Doctrine and Covenants.
23. Matthew 7:21; italics added.
24. John 14:15; Doctrine and Covenants 124:87.
25. See 3 Nephi 12:48; Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 27:27.
26. James 1:22.
27. See Articles of Faith 1:4.
28. See Alma 12:32–34; Doctrine and Covenants 130:20–21.
29. Alma 34:16; see also Mosiah 15:9; Alma 42.
30. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:37.
31. Articles of Faith 1:4.
32. John 3:5.
33. Articles of Faith 1:4; see also 1:5.
34. Doctrine and Covenants 20:77.
35. Mosiah 5:2; see also Alma 5:12–14.
36. Moses 6:65.
37. Mosiah 5:2.
38. See Moroni 10:32.
39. Doctrine and Covenants 64:33.
40. Hebrews 12:2.
41. In Conference Report, Apr. 1996, 92; or *Ensign*, May 1996, 67.

President Monson

Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has just spoken to us.

We shall now be pleased to hear from Elder Richard G. Scott, also a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He will be followed by Sister Elaine L. Jack, general president of the Relief Society.

Elder Richard G. Scott

God's great plan of happiness

The scriptures record, "And I, God, created man . . . ; male and female created I them."¹ This was done spiritually in your premortal existence when you lived in the presence of your Father in Heaven. Your gender existed before you came to earth. You elected to have this earth experience as part of His plan for you. The prophets call it "the plan of mercy,"² the "eternal plan of deliverance,"³ "the plan of salvation,"⁴ and, yes, "the great plan of happiness."⁵ You were taught this plan before you came to earth and there rejoiced in the privilege of participating in it.

Obedience to the plan is a requisite for full happiness in this life and a continuation of eternal joy beyond the veil. Essential to His plan of happiness is agency—the right of personal choice. Also fundamental is the holy privilege of procreation to be exercised within the commitment of legal marriage. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. The family is ordained of God.⁶ As husband and wife, you have the responsibility to bear children and to nurture and train them spiritually, emotionally, and physically.⁷

Satan also has a plan. It is a cunning, evil, subtle plan of destruction.⁸ It is his