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### The Christian Character: The Teachings of the Apostles I

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*Apostolic literature. (a) The Gospels.* The four Gospels of the New Testament may be said to represent a Life, and the teachings exclusively of the Christ. They contain the facts of the development both of his doctrine and of his life, and may be said to be exclusively his. The book of Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles contain the doctrine of the apostles which doctrines are but reflections of the teachings of the Christ through their minds. They represent the efforts of inspired men to put into practical application the doctrines of the Christ, and make them doctrines woven into character.

It is surprising to find how few of the apostles attempted this work in writing. The Acts of the Apostles may properly be regarded as an historical document, the extension of the gospel according to St. Luke, for it is quite generally conceded that he wrote both books. The Acts, being historical, deals with Christian character-development of the several active agents in the work of founding the church. Mentioning briefly the early action of the apostles and some few associates as a body cooperating together; then of Stephen, and Phillip [*sic*], and Barnabas, James, brother of St. John, and also John Mark, cousin of Barnabas, and author of the Gospel which bears his name. After the sixteenth chapter the book resolves itself into a narrative of the missionary activities of St. Paul; and others pass out of the picture.

All the Epistles together with the Apocalypse or Revelation may be referred to St. Paul, St. Peter, St. John, and St. James. The authorship of St. Jude is somewhat doubtful.<sup>a</sup>

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<sup>a</sup>Doubt about the authorship of the Epistle of Jude dates back at least to Eusebius, who includes the Epistle of Jude in what he calls “the disputed” books. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3, 25, 3. Elder Talmage refers to this passage in Eusebius in *Articles of Faith*, 246–47. Elder Bruce R. McConkie maintains that the author is indeed Jude, one of Christ’s brothers; *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965–73), 3:416. The *LDS Bible Dictionary* says under the entry “Jude” that he is the “probable author of the epistle of Jude.”

**(b) *The Epistles.*** One other thing may help to a right understanding of the New Testament and to its interpretation; namely, the fact that the Epistles and not the four Gospels are the earliest Christian documents; and that the Gospels, coming later, may be regarded as the more seasoned statements concerning both the facts of the life of the Christ and his doctrines. To show what is here meant, we may take for example the facts about the resurrection as set forth by St. Paul in his fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. If when writing that chapter St. Paul had had the four-fold account given in the four Gospels on the subject of the resurrection, and Christ's very definite appearances not only to the apostles, but to the women among his disciples, Paul would have been able to have given a much fuller account of that great central Christian event than he did in the aforesaid chapter of the Epistle to the Corinthians. And so in respect of many other things. But even so, the doctrine of the apostles in their epistles very admirably bring forth those doctrines and give admonitions concerning ethical principles of the gospel as to plainly set forth the Christian character to be striven for, and which alone will both represent and vindicate the doctrines of the gospel of Christ as applied to human lives; and underneath all doctrinal exposition, and admonitions to right living, we shall find at work that great primary principle which from the beginning has ever been present in God's plan for the mortal life of man, namely: "We will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them" (Abr. 3:25).

*The primacy of St. Peter.* Emphasis upon obedience was manifested in the opening of the mission of the apostles to the world. In obedience to the injunction of the Master, the apostles remained in Jerusalem until endowed by power from on high—the outpouring of the Holy Ghost upon them. This in the visible manifestation as tongues of flaming fire, when the multitude at Pentecost overwhelmed by the visible presence of God's power cried out in great anxiety, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). In answer to that question they were required first of all to give evidence of the first great law of the gospel, they must render an act of obedience to the message sent to them. Hence St. Peter as chief of the apostles, said to them: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins," and then he gave the promise to them of a baptism also of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38).

We must regard St. Peter as the head of the church after the departure of the Christ, and in close association with him St. James, and St. John; for to them throughout the New Testament is accorded a

certain primacy which admits of no doubt as to their being the selected ~~head~~ presidency of the church on earth. To St. Peter the Lord himself said: "I [will] give unto ⟨you⟩ [thee] the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever ⟨you⟩ [thou shalt] bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19). This primacy follows him throughout the Christian documents, and in connection with him is the special association of James and John, observable even during the public ministry of the Master.

*The doctrines of St. Peter: (a) The deity of Christ.* Because of the primacy of St. Peter, we follow him first in the development of those doctrines and admonitions in which he gives practical instructions to be woven into character and life.

In this part of his ministry described in the Acts of the Apostles, we note him as the chief witness of the Divinity of our Lord, saying to the multitudes assembled in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost; "Let all the house of Israel know [assuredly], that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). He taught repentance and baptism for remission of sin as preparation for reception or baptism of the Holy Ghost. He ~~scorned and~~ severely reproved those who thought the Holy Ghost and its spiritual gifts could be purchased with money (Acts 2:38-39; cf. 8:14-23). He rebuked those who dealt deceitfully in matters of consecrations of moneys to the common interests of the church, and charged them with lying unto God when they lied unto the Holy Ghost. The instant death of the offenders emphasized his reproofs.<sup>1</sup> He taught that men ought to obey God rather than man, when human and divine jurisdiction were in conflict (Acts 5:29). St. Peter also introduced the gospel to the Gentiles, through the household of Cornelius as detailed in the tenth chapter of the Acts. He sat in council ~~of~~ *with* "the apostles and elders" afterwards held in Jerusalem to determine the question of ~~extending the gospel to the Gentiles~~ *including the Gentiles within the gospel covenant*, and was the chief witness to the grace of God being extended to the Gentiles; his testimony with that of St. Paul and Barnabas, being the determining factors that induced the favorable decision of the council in the behalf of the Gentiles (Acts 15).

After that St. Peter's activities are no further recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, and we may know him as an expounder only through his epistles.

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 5, the case of Ananias and Sapphira.

In these St. Peter is true to himself and his own experience in laying the foundation of his knowledge of the Truth, and the Way, and the Life, on the complete acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God, true deity in himself, as well as in what he derived from the Father.

**(b) *The life of the Christ to be reflected in his disciples.*** This is the foundation of his doctrine and admonition not only in the first Epistle, but in the second also. From this ground he urges the striving of the saints for the end of their faith, “even the salvation of their souls,” and hence his admonition to them:

Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. . . . Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. . . . Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. (1 Pet. 1:13-19, 22, 23)

Wherefore laying aside all malice, and [all] guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. (1 Pet. 2:1-2)

Again he said to them,

Ye are *a* chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. . . . Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that . . . good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Pet. 2:9-12)

He admonishes them to be subject to the civil authorities and announces it to be “the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness. . . . Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king” (1 Pet. 2:15-17).

He also gave instruction on the domestic relations, urging that husband and wife so live “as being heirs together of the grace of life,” and urged the community to be all of one mind, having compassion one of another, loving as brethren, being pitiful and courteous, not “rend[er]ing

evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing” (1 Pet. 3:7-9); “For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile; Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it” (1 Pet. 3:10-11).

**(c) *Spirit of the Christian ministry.*** And so on practically though all the virtues; and towards the close of the first Epistle, he gives out the following as the spirit in which the church government is to be exercised. To the elders among the churches:

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. (1 Pet. 5:2-3)

He advised the younger to submit unto the elder; that they be clothed with humility, “for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” He gives them assurance that God careth for them—even for the humble. “Be sober, be  $\langle$ diligent $\rangle$  [vigilant]” he admonishes them (1 Pet. 5:5-8).

***The Second Epistle: Summary of Christian virtues.*** In the second Epistle, addressed, it is generally conceded, to the same people, he points out the unerring way by which those who have undertaken the Christian life may be “partakers of the divine nature,” and who have escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust; and now:

Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. . . . If ye do these things, ye shall never  $\langle$ fail $\rangle$  [fall]. (2 Pet. 1:5-10)

Building with theses foundation stones here enumerated, together with the other admonitions of this apostle—*living* in strict harmony with all this—what a desirable character a true Christian ~~character~~ would be! What a Life, coming in sequence of a knowledge of the Truth, and a knowledge of the Way, both through the doctrine of the Christ, the example of his life and the harmonious instruction in the doctrines of this, the chief apostle!

***St. Paul: The deity of the Christ witnessed by his resurrection.*** Following St. Peter in setting forth the Christian life and character,

and second only to him in that work, is St. Paul. We may not follow even in outline the personal history of this remarkable man, nor relate the adventures of his missionary journeys, nor seek to point out in detail the doctrinal development to be found in his Epistles. It will be enough to say that like St. Peter, St. Paul founded his conception of the gospel upon the reality of Deity being revealed in Jesus Christ, as the very Son of God. For Paul the truth of this is upheld by the fact of the Christ's resurrection from the dead. He closes his great testimony on the deity of the Christ in Mars Hill by saying: "Whereof he ⟨God⟩ hath given assurance unto all men ⟨that Jesus will judge the world—hence Deity⟩, in that he ⟨God⟩ hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). Throughout his work *we* may say that St. Paul is as much the apostle of the resurrection as he is of the Gentiles.

What is here stated briefly as to Paul's acceptance of the deity of the Christ is clearly and more emphatically stated in *a* number of other places in his writings, but in none clearer perhaps than in the letter to Timothy, wherein he says:

Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh ⟨marginal rendering manifested⟩, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. (1 Tim. 3:16)

All this in reference to the Christ whom Paul accepted as God and the very revelation of God.

In Hebrews (and I make no question but Paul is the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews), Paul reaffirms the doctrine of the deity of the Christ:

God, who at sundry times and *in* divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers ⟨through⟩ [by] the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir ⟨to⟩ [of] all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his ⟨the Father's⟩ person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. (Heb. 1:1-4)

And through the rest of this first chapter of Hebrews he reaffirms in a number of forms, the deity of the Christ.

*St. Paul's doctrine of obedience.* This the foundation of Paul's doctrines as well as of St. Peter's, and he recognizes the gospel as God's plan and covenant of granting eternal life to man, declaring in his letter

to Titus that he himself lived in “hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2).

While Paul greatly stressed faith as the means of approach to that form of doctrine which would bring salvation, and producing righteousness as an effect, he stressed nevertheless that principle which underlies that whole gospel plan and which received its impetus in that pre-earth council with the spirits designed to live upon the earth, announced by the Father: “We will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them” (Abr. 3:25). And this finds echo in Paul’s teaching in the following passage introducing it with reference to the Christ as the Son of God. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation [un]to all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:8-9).<sup>b</sup>

*The ethic of St. Paul.* The teachings of St. Paul as affecting and building up the Christian character, ~~for~~ doctrine which would mould a Christian life, may really be summarized from his letter to the Ephesians. In this letter he reminds the Ephesians that as Gentiles, now brought into the faith of the gospel, they have received the gospel as a peculiar gift of grace from God, and most earnestly he prayed that God would grant unto them

according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that  $\langle$ they $\rangle$  [ye] might be filled with all the fulness of God. (Eph. 3:16-19)

Later on he admonishes them that henceforth they

walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness  $\langle$ and $\rangle$  [with] greediness. But ye  $\langle$ he triumphantly exclaims $\rangle$  have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new

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<sup>b</sup>In the Joseph Smith Translation, verse 8 refers to Melchizedek and verse 9 refers to Christ.



man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man  $\langle$ the $\rangle$  truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed  $\langle$ from $\rangle$  [out of] your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. (Eph. 4:17-32)

*Final admonition: "Be ye followers of God."*

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes  $\langle$ in $\rangle$  darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the  $\langle$ effect $\rangle$  [fruit] of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.) (Eph. 5:1-9)

Much more might be gleaned from Paul's writings and admonitions tending to outline and establish Christian character, but what more can be needed then this? And how excellent it all is! Think of a life founded in this faith and sanctified by these admonitions until the life becomes realized in the character! What could be desired more? It is merely filling in the detail of the admonition of the Christ, "be ye perfect, even as I, or your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (cf. Matt. 5:48; 3 Ne. 12:48). Surely the Christian character molded under Paul's instruction would be all that could be desired and represents truly the life founded upon the gospel.

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Further references recommended by Roberts for this lesson: 1, 2, and 3 Nephi; Mosiah 4-5; D&C 42 and 45.