



Type: Magazine Article

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## Lesson VIII. The Church of Christ: Some First Principles

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Source: *The Young Woman's Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 10 (October 1913),  
pp. 639–644

Published by: Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association

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**Abstract:** The Gospel defined—The relation of the Gospel to the atonement—The place of the Christ in the evolutionary Gospel history of man—The purpose of the present lesson—The Gospel known to the Nephites from their earliest history—The history of the Gospel also known to them—The fundamental principles—Faith—The necessity of faith—The nature of faith—Repentance—The necessity of repentance—The reward of repentance—Baptism—The necessity of baptism—Baptism for the remission of sins—How baptism should be performed—The baptism of children—The Holy Ghost—How it was conferred—The sacrament of the Lord's supper—Summary.

pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin, save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceeding great many, who were made pure, and entered into the rest of the Lord their God.

"And now, my brethren, I would that ye should humble yourselves before God, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that ye may also enter into that rest."<sup>a</sup>

#### OUTLINE.

Introduction—The question of authority—Purpose of the present lesson—Divine authority necessary—The beginning of divine authority upon the earth—The antiquity of the Priesthood—The Priesthood open to all men in righteousness—The Priesthood abhors evil—The name of the Priesthood—The manner of conferring the Priesthood—The name of the Church of Christ—The officers of the Church, and of the Priesthood—What the Priesthood meant to the Nephites—Alma's exhortation.

#### QUESTIONS.

1. What principle of Christian doctrine is perhaps more strenuously insisted upon than any other?

<sup>a</sup>Alma 13:12, 13.

2. What would it mean to a sectarian denomination to receive a complete assurance of its divine authority?

3. Why should we expect to find the knowledge and the recognition of divine authority present with the Nephites?

4. When was it first recognized by the American peoples that they must be endowed with divine authority?

5. Cite instances of divine calling.

6. Who were permitted to preach in the days of Alma?

7. Who first ordained men to the Holy Priesthood?

8. Why is the Holy Priesthood named after the Son of God?

9. When did the Priesthood begin?

10. Who might enjoy the blessings of the Priesthood?

11. Through the exercise of what principle did men receive the Priesthood?

12. What was required of men after they had received the Priesthood?

13. Who was Melchizedek?

14. Why was the Holy Priesthood named after him?

15. How was the Priesthood conferred?

16. What offices of the Priesthood are named in the Book of Mormon?

17. What did the possession of the Priesthood mean to the Nephites?

18. What would have been their condition had they not been endowed with it?

## LESSON VIII.

### THE CHURCH OF CHRIST.

#### SOME FIRST PRINCIPLES.

The Gospel is defined to be the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes. The belief that brings salvation is further said to be belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, with full confidence in the virtue of His atoning sacrifice. It is really upon the atonement, then, that the Gospel turns. And Jesus Christ, the Mediator, the Redeemer from original sin, is the central figure in the evolutionary Gospel history of man. These points are made clear in the Jewish scripture. It will be inter-

esting to learn what the Nephites taught concerning the Gospel and its fundamental principles. It is purposed, therefore, to learn in this lesson when the Nephites received the Gospel, what it meant to them, and what they knew of its history. It is purposed further to consider what the Nephites taught of the fundamental principles of faith, repentance, baptism, the conferring of the Holy Ghost, and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

The Gospel of the Lord Jesus

Christ was known to the Nephites, and was preached by them, at the very beginning of their separate existence. As early as the tenth chapter of the First Book of Nephi, when Lehi was still encamped with his family in the wilderness in the Old World, Lehi instructed his sons "concerning the Gospel which should be preached among the Jews,"<sup>a</sup> and outlined clearly to them the nature of that Gospel. There was no time in the history of the descendants of Lehi when they could excuse wickedness by saying that they had not heard the Gospel of Christ. Jacob preached the Gospel far and wide.<sup>b</sup> It was declared that the Gospel should be given to all the world.<sup>c</sup> It was explained that revelations, prophecies, gifts, healing, speaking with tongues, and the interpretation of tongues, were peculiar characteristics of the Gospel, and that "he that denieth these things, knoweth not the Gospel of Christ."<sup>d</sup> Moreover, the whole history of the Gospel was apparently known to the Nephite prophets. Lehi himself had learned of the pre-existence.<sup>e</sup> Nephi foresaw that there would be "taken away from the Gospel of the Lamb, many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord;" and that therefore many would stumble and fall by the way.<sup>f</sup> Other prophets foreknew that there would be a general apostasy.<sup>g</sup> But all of them saw, too, that "the Lord [would] set His hand again the second time to restore His people

<sup>a</sup>I Nephi 10:11. Read chapters 10-15 inclusive.

<sup>b</sup>Jacob 1:1-8.

<sup>c</sup>II Nephi 29:12, 13.

<sup>d</sup>Mor. 9:7, 8.

<sup>e</sup>II Nephi 2:17, 18.

<sup>f</sup>I Nephi 13:24-26; 29.

<sup>g</sup>Alma 45:8-14.

from their lost and fallen state."<sup>h</sup> It may be safely asserted, therefore, that the Nephite Church knew well what the Gospel is; and they understood, too, what its history was before their time, and what it should be after their time.

In preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Nephites promulgated the same principles and doctrines that are set forth in the Jewish Scriptures. And this full preaching of the Gospel was not limited to the period after the crucifixion of the Christ. The first principles of the Gospel were taught as clearly in the early days of the Nephite history as after the coming of the Christ. Ether saw the finger of the Lord because of his faith.<sup>i</sup> Nephi was commended for his faith.<sup>j</sup> Lehi derived power through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>k</sup> Jacob exhorted his brethren to pray "with exceeding faith."<sup>l</sup> Benjamin delivered a sublime exhortation to faith in these simple words:

"Believe in God; believe that He is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that He has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend."<sup>m</sup>

And when missionaries were sent out in later years, they were instructed to dwell at length upon the principle of faith:

"Preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; teach them to humble themselves, and to be meek and lowly in heart; teach them to withstand every temptation of the

<sup>h</sup>II Nephi 25:17-18; Mor. 8:26; Ether 5:2-4.

<sup>i</sup>Ether 12:19-20.

<sup>j</sup>I Nephi 2:19.

<sup>k</sup>I Nephi 10:17.

<sup>l</sup>Jacob 3:1.

<sup>m</sup>Mos. 4:9.

devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>n</sup>

Moreover, the Nephites had no misconception of the nature of faith. The prophets knew what they required when they exhorted the people to believe in Jesus Christ. "Faith," explains Alma, "is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith, ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true." Again he writes, "Yea, there are many who do say, If thou wilt show us a sign from heaven, then we shall know of a surety; then we shall believe. Now I ask, Is this faith? Behold, I say unto you, nay; for if a man knoweth a thing, he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it." And again, he pleads, "I would that ye should remember that God is merciful unto all who believe on His name; therefore, He desireth, in the first place, that ye should believe, yea, even on His word."<sup>o</sup>

The Book of Mormon prophets explained the nature and necessity of repentance as clearly and as satisfactorily as they did the first principle, faith. Repentance was preached by the ancient prophets at Jerusalem.<sup>p</sup> An angel explained to Nephi that all would be well even with the Gentiles, if they would repent.<sup>q</sup> Alma was urged by the Spirit to "go forth and say unto this people, Repent, for except ye repent ye can in no wise inherit the kingdom of heaven."<sup>r</sup> It was declared by all the prophets that all men, everywhere, must repent if they would be saved in the kingdom of God.<sup>s</sup> It was declared time and

again, that, "the days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation."<sup>t</sup> And it was further taught that the promises and blessings of God could be obtained only on repentance.

"Yea, he that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually without ceasing; unto such it is given to know the mysteries of God; yea, unto such it shall be given to reveal things which never have been revealed; yea, and it shall be given unto such to bring thousands of souls to repentance."<sup>u</sup>

The Nephites were evidently very human. They possessed all the weaknesses of mortality, as well as its points of strength. It was only by unceasing labor, that the prophets were enabled to keep their people at all mindful of the principles of faith and repentance. Even then, when these principles were fairly well observed, it appears that other sources of defection arose. In the matter of the third principle—and ordinance—of the Gospel, for example, there were at times conflicting opinions. The first Alma, however, commanded his people "that there should be no contention one with another, but that they should look forward with one eye, having one faith and one baptism."<sup>v</sup> And what the nature of that one baptism should be is very clearly set forth.

In the first place, it was taught that baptism was really essential to salvation. Nephi exhorted his people, before his death, to be mindful of the commandments of the Lord. He urged them to perform all that

<sup>n</sup>Alma 37:33.

<sup>o</sup>Alma 32:16-32.

<sup>p</sup>I Nephi 1:4.

<sup>q</sup>INephi 14:5.

<sup>r</sup>Alma 5:51.

<sup>s</sup>I Nephi 10:18; II Nephi 9:23; 26:27.

<sup>t</sup>II Nephi 2:21.

<sup>u</sup>Alma 26:22.

<sup>v</sup>Mos. 18:21.

God had required of them, and argued that baptism was essential to salvation since the Son of God Himself, who was without sin, had to submit to that ordinance in order to fulfil all righteousness.<sup>w</sup> Moreover, Nephi declared that God had commanded that all men should be baptized.

"The voice of the Son came unto me," he writes, "saying, He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do."<sup>x</sup>

Again, "He commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in His name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God."<sup>y</sup>

The Nephites taught, not only that baptism is essential to salvation, but also that it is performed for the remission of sins, and properly only by immersion in water. "Turn all ye Gentiles from your wicked ways," we read, " \* \* \* and be baptized in my name, that ye may receive a remission of your sins."<sup>z</sup> So also, before the time of the Savior, the prophets called upon men to be baptized, that they might be washed from their sins.<sup>a</sup> This baptism unto repentance is of force, however, only if it is performed by complete immersion in water. Alma buried in water those whom he baptized.<sup>b</sup> And Jesus Himself instructed his followers that, when baptizing, they should "immerse [the candidates] in the water, and come forth again out of the water."<sup>c</sup> Finally, the Nephites taught emphatically

that the ordinance should be applied only to those who were old enough to exercise faith and to repent. Therefore, "it is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children."<sup>d</sup>

Since the Nephites understood so well the first three principles and ordinances of the Gospel, it is only to be expected that they understood, also the fourth ordinance. The existence of the Holy Ghost was well known to them. They knew it, too, to be a personage of spirit.<sup>e</sup> They knew that they might secure the gift of the Holy Ghost through righteousness, for it was promised to them from the earliest times.<sup>f</sup> And they understood that the gift was to be conferred by the laying on of the hands of men holding authority. Thus, we read that Alma "clapped his hands upon all them who were with him. And behold, as he clapped his hands upon them they were filled with the Holy Spirit."<sup>g</sup> When Christ visited the Nephites, He commissioned them specially to bestow the Holy Ghost, and instructed them in the performance of the ordinance.<sup>h</sup>

It is evident, then, that the formal worship and religious life of the Nephites were based upon the same Gospel principles as were taught by Jesus in the meridian of time, and again by Joseph Smith in the last dispensation. The Gospel is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It remains now to consider what the Nephite theology taught in the matter of one other fundamentally important principle and ordinance of Gospel life.

The sacrament of the Lord's Sup-

<sup>w</sup>II Nephi 31:5-7.

<sup>x</sup>II Nephi 31:12.

<sup>y</sup>II Nephi 9:23.

<sup>z</sup>III Nephi 30:2; 1:23; 12:2.

<sup>a</sup>Alma 7:14.

<sup>b</sup>Mos. 18:12-16.

<sup>c</sup>III Nephi 11:26.

<sup>d</sup>Moro. 8:8-14.

<sup>e</sup>I Nephi 11:9-11.

<sup>f</sup>II Nephi 31:12, 13; III Nephi 9:20.

<sup>g</sup>Alma 31:36.

<sup>h</sup>III Nephi 18:36, 37; Moro. 2:1-3.

per was, of course, unknown to the Nephites before the time of Christ. It was when Christ came to them that He instituted that sacred memorial rite amongst them; and He commanded them that they should observe the ceremony after He had gone.<sup>1</sup> He explained, moreover, that the broken bread is an emblem of His broken body, and that the wine is an emblem of His spilt blood.<sup>2</sup> And He gave instruction further that this sacrament should be administered to the members of the Church.<sup>3</sup> Thenceforth, the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper became an established feature of the Nephite Church ritual. Moroni recorded complete directions for the performance of the ordinance.<sup>4</sup> The third Nephi and Mormon both solicitously explained that this memorial sacrament must not be partaken of unworthily.<sup>5</sup>

"For whoso eateth and drinketh my flesh and blood unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to his soul," declared the Savior of the world.

And Mormon, with a human sympathy all his own, stated the matter thus, on broad and noble lines:

"See that ye are not baptized unworthily; see that ye partake not of the sacrament of Christ unworthily; but see that ye do all things in worthiness, and do it in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God; and if ye do this, and endure to the end, ye will in no wise be cast out."<sup>6</sup>

It will be well now to review what we have learned in this lesson

1. The Gospel is the power of God

<sup>1</sup>III Nephi 18:1-4.

<sup>2</sup>III Nephi 18:7-12.

<sup>3</sup>III Nephi 18:5, 6.

<sup>4</sup>Moro. 4:1-3; 5:1, 2.

<sup>5</sup>III Nephi 18:27-29; Moro. 9:29.

<sup>6</sup>Moro. 9:29.

unto salvation to everyone that believes. 2. The basic principle of the Gospel is the atonement. 3. Jesus Christ is the central figure in the evolutionary Gospel history of man. 4. The Gospel as the power of God unto salvation was known to the Nephites and was preached by them. 5. The necessity and meaning of faith were thoroughly understood by them. 6. The Nephite prophets explained clearly the nature and necessity of repentance. 7. They preached that there must be but one baptism, that for remission of sins, and by immersion. 8. They taught that it was mockery to baptize little children. 9. They taught that the Holy Ghost is a personage of Spirit, and that the gift of the Holy Ghost is to be conferred by the laying on of hands. 10. Finally, they explained the nature and sanctity of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

All these things were known to the Nephites. And they understood them as well as have the children of God in any land at any time. The Gospel was taught by the Nephites in clearness and in simplicity.

#### OUTLINE.

The Gospel defined—The relation of the Gospel to the atonement—The place of the Christ in the evolutionary Gospel history of man—The purpose of the present lesson—The Gospel known to the Nephites from their earliest history—The history of the Gospel also known to them—The fundamental principles—Faith—The necessity of faith—The nature of faith—Repentance—The necessity of repentance—The reward of repentance—Baptism—The necessity of baptism—Baptism for the remission of sins—How baptism should be performed—The baptism of children—The Holy Ghost—How it was conferred—The sacrament of the Lord's supper—Summary.

## QUESTIONS.

1. What is the Gospel?
2. What belief, or faith, is it that brings salvation?
3. What relation does the atonement bear to the Gospel?
4. When was the Gospel first preached by the Nephites?
5. Why did the Nephites at no time in their history have an excuse for wickedness?
6. What, according to the Nephite prophet, are the peculiar characteristics of the Gospel?
7. What is said of the man who denies these characteristics?
8. How much of the history of the Gospel was known to the Nephites?
9. What fundamental principles were taught by the Nephites in their preaching of the Gospel?
10. What did they teach concerning the necessity of faith?
11. What is the difference between faith and knowledge?
12. What, then, does God desire of all men first of all?
13. Why is repentance necessary?
14. Who must repent?
15. What rewards follow repentance?
16. How did Nephi prove the necessity of baptism?
17. What is the purpose of baptism?
18. How is baptism properly performed?
19. Why is the baptism of little children a mockery?
20. How was the Holy Ghost conferred amongst the Nephites?
21. When was the sacrament of the Lord's Supper instituted amongst the Nephites?
22. What did they teach concerning it?
23. Give a review of this lesson.
24. Why is it always maintained that the Gospel is taught in the Book of Mormon in clearness and in simplicity?

## JUNIOR LESSONS.

## The Life of the Savior.

## LESSON VII.

## THE BAPTISM AND TEMPTATION OF THE SAVIOR.

Read Matthew, 3:13-17; 4:1-11; Mark, 1:9-13. Luke, 3:21-23; 4:1-13.

It was while John was baptizing in the Jordan,\* that Jesus left His home at Nazareth to begin the work of His life. It is supposed that He journeyed to the fords of Bethabara, about twenty miles southeast of Nazareth. At this place, John was preaching and baptizing. The Savior immediately requested baptism. When John, who recognized the Son of God, humbly protested that he had need to be baptized of the Master, the answer came "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it be-

cometh us to fulfill all righteousness." The Savior knew that baptism is a law for entrance into the Church; and that He, the Head of the Church, must set the example for all men. This of itself is sufficient evidence that without baptism, righteousness can not be wholly fulfilled by any man.

When this had been explained, John no longer objected, but baptized the Savior. Little is said in the Bible about the exact manner of the baptism except by inference; through latter-day revelation we are sure that it was by immersion.

When Jesus came out of the water, "the heavens were opened

\*Mark 1:4, 5.