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The First Principles of the Gospel

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CHAPTER VII

The First Principles of the Gospel

HOW THE SINNER MAY BE CLEANSED. You cannot take a murderer, a suicide, an adulterer, a liar, or one who was or is thoroughly abominable in his life here, and simply by the performance of an ordinance of the gospel, cleanse him from sin and usher him into the presence of God. God has not instituted a plan of that kind, and it cannot be done. He has said you shall repent of your sins. The wicked will have to repent of their wickedness. Those who die without the knowledge of the gospel will have to come to the knowledge of it, and those who sin against light will have to pay the uttermost farthing for their transgression and their departure from the gospel, before they can ever get back to it. Do not forget that. Do not forget it, you elders in Israel, nor you, mothers in Israel, either; and, when you seek to save either the living or the dead, bear it in mind that you can only do it on the principle of their repentance and acceptance of the plan of life. That is the only way in which you can succeed.—*Oct. C. R.*, 1907, pp. 6, 7.

FALLACY OF DEATH-BED REPENTANCE. I do not believe in the ideas that we hear sometimes advanced in the world, that it matters but little what men do in this life, if they will but confess Christ at the end of their journey in life, that that is all-sufficient, and that by so doing they will receive their passport into heaven. I denounce this doctrine. It is unscriptural, it is unreasonable, it is untrue, and it will not avail any man, no matter by whom this idea may be advocated; it will prove an utter failure unto men. As reasonable beings, as men and women of intelligence, we cannot

help but admire and honor the doctrine of Jesus Christ, which is the doctrine of God, and which requires of every man and woman righteousness in their lives, purity in their thoughts, uprightness in their daily walk and conversation, devotion to the Lord, love of truth, love of their fellowman, and above all things in the world the love of God. These were the precepts that were inculcated by the Son of God when he walked among his brethren in the meridian of time. He taught these precepts; he exemplified them in his life, and advocated continually the doing of the will of him that sent him.—*Oct. C. R.*, 1907, p. 3.

THE CHANGE THAT COMES WITH REPENTANCE AND BAPTISM. That change comes today to every son and daughter of God who repents of his or her sins, who humble themselves before the Lord, and who seek forgiveness and remission of sin by baptism by immersion, by one having authority to administer this sacred ordinance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For it is this new birth that was spoken of by Christ to Nicodemus as absolutely essential that men might see the kingdom of God, and without which no man could enter into the kingdom. Each of us can remember, perhaps, the change that came into our hearts when we were baptized for the remission of our sins. Perhaps it is not proper for one to speak of himself or of his own experiences, because there may be those within the sound of my voice who object to a man speaking of himself, and especially when he shall say any good of himself; yet I speak not of myself, I speak of the influence and power of the Holy Spirit that I experienced when I had been baptized for the remission of my sins. The feeling that came upon me was that of pure peace, of love and of light. I felt in my soul that if I had sinned—and surely I was not without sin—that it had been forgiven me; that I was indeed cleansed from sin; my heart was touched, and I felt that I would not injure the smallest insect beneath my feet. I felt as if I wanted to do good

everywhere to everybody and to everything. I felt a newness of life, a newness of desire to do that which was right. There was not one particle of desire for evil left in my soul. I was but a little boy, it is true, when I was baptized; but this was the influence that came upon me, and I know that it was from God, and was and ever has been a living witness to me of my acceptance of the Lord.

Oh! that I could have kept that same spirit and that same earnest desire in my heart every moment of my life from that day to this. Yet many of us who have received that witness, that new birth, that change of heart, while we may have erred in judgment or have made many mistakes, and often perhaps come short of the true standard in our lives, we have repented of the evil, and we have sought from time to time forgiveness at the hand of the Lord; so that until this day the same desire and purpose which pervaded our souls when we were baptized and received a remission of our sins, still holds possession of our hearts, and is still the ruling sentiment and passion of our souls. Though we may at times be stirred to anger, and our wrath move us to say and do things which are not pleasing in the sight of God, yet instantly on regaining our sober senses and recovering from our lapse into the power of darkness, we feel humble, repentant, and to ask forgiveness for the wrong that we have done to ourselves, and perchance to others. The great, earnest, overwhelming desire, which is born of the truth and of the witness of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the people who obey the truth, assumes sway and again takes possession of our souls, to lead us on in the path of duty. This is my testimony and I know it is true.—*Apr. C. R.*, 1898, pp. 65, 66.

THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM. “The Light has come to the world, and he who will not see it shall be condemned.” The truth is here, and shall men living now be heard to complain hereafter that they have not the truth in their hearts?

Certainly not. It is here for all who will seek it, and it shall be to their undoing if they do not obtain it.

The Savior said to Nicodemus, "except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God," and that is true today. A man must be born from ignorance into truth, today, before he can expect to see any difference between a Latter-day Saint and another not of the faith. If he is not so born, he is more blind than the one whom Christ healed, for having eyes he sees not, and having ears, hears not.

Is there any difference between the baptized and the unbaptized man? All the difference in the world, I tell you, but it is only discernible through the Spirit. It is a vast difference, too great for one not in possession of the Spirit to comprehend. Take two men, they may be equals in point of goodness, they may be equally moral, charitable, honest and just, but one is baptized and the other is not. There is a mighty difference between them, for one is the son of God redeemed by compliance with his laws, and the other remains in darkness.

The Scriptures say that a rich man would hardly enter the kingdom of heaven, but it does not mean that riches will condemn a man, not at all. God is pleased to see us acquire riches for he intends ultimately to give to us the whole earth as an eternal inheritance, but it is the love of riches that kills. A great gulf separates those who enter the house of the Lord and take wives, and those who do not thus marry—a tremendous gulf, but to the unspiritual eye no difference is apparent.

I thank God for "Mormonism," so called; it is the power of God unto salvation. It is the duty of every Latter-day Saint to know of its truth and to exemplify it. Its destiny is to overwhelm error and supplant it with righteousness and peace,—*From a sermon, given in Logan, Feb. 2, 1909.*

WHEN TO BAPTIZE CHILDREN. We confess to having been considerably surprised when attending one of our latest Sunday School conventions on learning that in some wards in the Church only once or twice in each year are opportunities given to the children of the Saints to be baptized. We hold the opinion that in every stake of Zion there should be opportunity for baptism every day of every month and every month in every year, for we believe that it is an admirable practice where parents, in conformity with the revelations of God, have taught their children in the first principles of the gospel—faith, repentance and baptism, to have them baptized on their birthdays, when they arrive at the age of eight years. This practice has many advantages. In the first place, when a child is baptized on his birthday, he has no difficulty in remembering the day when that sacred ordinance was performed in his case. Again, it prevents the tendency manifested by some people to delay and postpone duties that are always best performed in their proper time and season. When once a child has passed the eight year mark, there appears no particular necessity for the immediate performance of the ordinance, and the parents are apt to put it off from day to day and from week to week, until months have passed over, and the matter is not attended to. Should it so happen that in this interval the child is taken by the Lord, then this rite has to be performed in his behalf after his departure from our midst. How much better it is that the child have the opportunity of doing this all-important work for himself or herself.—*Juvenile Instructor*, Vol. 40, p. 337, June 1, 1905.

THROUGH ATONEMENT SINS ARE WASHED AWAY. When we commit sin, it is necessary that we repent of it and make restitution as far as lies in our power. When we cannot make restitution for the wrong we have done, then we must apply for the grace and mercy of God to cleanse us from that iniquity.

Men cannot forgive their own sins; they cannot cleanse themselves from the consequences of their sins. Men can stop sinning and can do right in the future, and so far their acts are acceptable before the Lord and worthy of consideration. But who shall repair the wrongs they have done to themselves and to others, which it seems impossible for them to repair themselves? By the atonement of Jesus Christ the sins of the repentant shall be washed away, though they be crimson they shall be made white as wool. This is the promise given to you. We who have not paid our tithing in the past, and are therefore under obligations to the Lord, which we are not in a position to discharge, the Lord requires that no longer at our hands, but will forgive us for the past if we will observe this law honestly in the future. That is generous and kind, and I feel grateful for it.—*Oct. C. R.*, 1899, p. 42.

CONDITIONS FOR BAPTISM. No person can be properly baptized unless he has faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and has repented of his sins, with a repentance that need not be repented of. But faith comes by hearing the word of God. This implies that the candidate must be taught. Efficient teaching and preparation must precede the ordinance, so that the candidate may have a proper appreciation and conception of its purposes. The call to baptism, in the mission of our Savior, was always preceded by instructions in the doctrines which he taught.—*Improvement Era*, Vol. 14, p. 266.

THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE GOSPEL. As Latter-day Saints we have every reason to rejoice in the gospel, and in the testimony we have received concerning its truth. I repeat, we have reason to rejoice and to be exceeding glad, for we possess the testimony of Jesus, the spirit of prophecy, which the people of the world know nothing about, nor can they, without obedience to the gospel.

Jesus thoroughly understood this matter, and fully ex-

plained it when he said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." On first reflection, it would seem that anything so clear, reasonable and tangible could be easily made plain to the understanding of all men. Hence the feeling that has prompted many of the Latter-day Saints to believe, after their minds have been enlightened by the Spirit of God—everything being made so plain and clear to them, that they had only to tell their friends and kindred what they had learned and they would gladly receive it. But how disappointed, after they had presented to them the truths of heaven in simplicity and plainness, to hear them say, "We cannot see it!" or, "We do not believe it!" or perhaps bitterly oppose it, which is by far the most common practice of the world. They cannot understand it. Why? Because, as Jesus has said, no man can see the kingdom except he is born again. You may preach the gospel to the people but unless they humble themselves as little children before the Lord, acknowledging their dependence upon him for light and wisdom, they cannot see or sense it, although you may preach to them in as great plainness as it is possible for the truth to be conveyed from one person to another. And should any believe your testimony it would only be belief. They would not see as you see—nor comprehend it, as you do—until they yield obedience to the requirements of the gospel, and through the remission of their sins receive the Holy Ghost. Then they, too, can see as you see, for they have the same spirit; then will they love the truth as you do, and may wonder why they could not comprehend it before, or why it is that there can be anybody with common intelligence that cannot understand truth so plain and forcible.

First, then, it is necessary to have faith in God, faith being the first principle in revealed religion, and the foundation of all righteousness.

Faith in God is to believe that he is, and "that he is the only supreme Governor and independent Being, in whom all

fulness and perfection and every good gift and principle dwell independently," and in whom the faith of all other rational beings must centre for life and salvation; and further, that he is the great Creator of all things, that he is omnipotent, omniscient, and by his works and the power of his spirit omnipresent.

Not only is it necessary to have faith in God, but also in Jesus Christ, his Son, the Savior of mankind and the Mediator of the New Covenant; and in the Holy Ghost, who bears record of the Father and the Son, "the same in all ages and forever."

Having this faith, it becomes necessary to repent. Repent of what? Of every sin of which we may have been guilty. How shall we repent of these sins? Does repentance consist of sorrow for wrong doing? Yes; but is this all? By no means. True repentance only is acceptable to God, nothing short of it will answer the purpose. Then what is true repentance? True repentance is not only sorrow for sins, and humble penitence and contrition before God, but it involves the necessity of turning away from them, a discontinuance of all evil practices and deeds, a thorough reformation of life, a vital change from evil to good, from vice to virtue, from darkness to light. Not only so, but to make restitution, so far as it is possible, for all the wrongs we have done, to pay our debts, and restore to God and man their rights—that which is due to them from us. This is true repentance, and the exercise of the will and all the powers of body and mind is demanded, to complete this glorious work of repentance; then God will accept it.

Having thus repented, the next thing requisite is baptism, which is an essential principle of the gospel—no man can enter into the gospel covenant without it. It is the door of the Church of Christ, we cannot get in there in any other way, for Christ hath said it. "Sprinkling," or "pouring," is not baptism. Baptism means immersion in water, and

is to be administered by one having authority, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Baptism without divine authority is not valid. It is a symbol of the burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and must be done in the likeness thereof, by one commissioned of God, in the manner prescribed, otherwise it is illegal and will not be accepted by him, nor will it effect a remission of sins, the object for which it is designed, but whosoever hath faith, truly repents and is "buried with Christ in baptism," by one having divine authority, shall receive a remission of sins, and is entitled to the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands.

Only those who are commissioned of Jesus Christ have authority or power to bestow this gift. The office of the Holy Ghost is to bear record of Christ, or to testify of him, and confirm the believer in the truth, by bringing to his recollection things that have passed, and showing or revealing to the mind things present and to come. "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." "He will guide you into all truth." Thus, without the aid of the Holy Ghost no man can know the will of God, or that Jesus is the Christ—the Redeemer of the world, or that the course he pursues, the work he performs, or his faith, are acceptable to God, and such as will secure to him the gift of eternal life, the greatest of all gifts. (John 14:26; 16:13.)

"But," says an objector, "have we not the Bible and are not the Holy Scripture able to make us wise unto salvation?" Yes, provided we obey them. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The "good works" are the great desideratum. The Bible itself is but the dead letter, it is

the Spirit that giveth life. The way to obtain the Spirit is that which is here marked out so plainly in the Scriptures. There is no other. Obedience, therefore, to these principles is absolutely necessary, in order to obtain the salvation and exaltation brought to light through the gospel.

As to the question of authority, nearly everything depends upon it. No ordinance can be performed to the acceptance of God without divine authority. No matter how fervently men may believe or pray, unless they are endowed with divine authority they can only act in their own name, and not legally nor acceptably in the name of Jesus Christ, in whose name all these things must be done. Some suppose this authority may be derived from the Bible, but nothing could be more absurd. The Bible is but a book containing the writings of inspired men, "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and instruction in righteousness," as such we hold it is sacred; but the Spirit, power and authority by which it is written cannot be found within its lids, nor derived from it. "For prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." If by reading and believing the Bible this authority could be obtained, all who read the Bible and believed it would have it—one equally with another. I have read the Bible, and I have as good reason for believing it as any other man, and do believe it with all my heart; but this does not give me authority to teach men in the name of the Lord, nor to officiate in the sacred ordinances of the gospel. Were the Scriptures the only source of knowledge, we would be without knowledge for ourselves, and would have to rest our hopes of salvation upon a simple belief in the testimonies and sayings of others. This will not do for me; I must know for myself, and if I act as a teacher of these things, I must be clothed with the same light, knowledge and authority as those were who acted in a similar calling anciently. Else how could I de-

clare the truth and bear testimony as they did? What right would I have to say, "thus saith the Lord," and call upon man to repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord? or, that "This Jesus hath God raised up [from the dead], whereof we all [the apostles] are witnesses"? And, therefore, let all men "know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus," who was crucified, "both Lord and Christ"? No man, without the Holy Ghost, as enjoyed by the ancient apostles, can know these things, therefore cannot declare them by authority, nor teach and prepare mankind for the salvation of God. God Almighty is the only source from whence this knowledge, power and authority can be obtained, and that through the operations of the Holy Ghost. The Scriptures may serve as a guide to lead us to God, and hence to the possession of all things necessary to life and salvation, but they can do no more.

Having profited by this example, and done the works commanded by both Christ and his apostles, ancient and modern, I am happy of the privilege to declare to the inhabitants of the earth that I have received this testimony and witness for myself. I do know that these things are true. Jesus, my Redeemer, lives, and God hath made him both Lord and Christ. To know and to worship the true God, in the name of Jesus—in spirit and in truth—is the duty of man. To aid and qualify him for this service is the duty and office of the Holy Ghost. Man may fail through faltering and unfaithfulness, but the Spirit of God will never fail, nor abandon the faithful disciple. I can say as one who has tried the experiment—for it may be called an experiment to the beginner—that all who will take the course and accept the doctrine thus marked out will, through faithfulness, become acquainted with the truth, and shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or of man, and will rejoice in it as all good, faithful Latter-day Saints do.

Here is an ordinance which we are now administering,

the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; it is a principle of the gospel, one as necessary to be observed by all believers, as any other ordinance of the gospel. What is the object of it? It is that we may keep in mind continually the Son of God who has redeemed us from eternal death, and brought us to life again through the power of the gospel. Before the coming of Christ to the earth, this was borne in mind by the inhabitants of the earth to whom the gospel was preached, by another ordinance which was a type of the great sacrifice that should take place in the meridian of time. Hence, Adam, after he was cast out of the garden, was commanded to offer sacrifices to God; by this act, he and all who participated in the offering of sacrifices, were reminded of the Savior who should come to redeem them from death which, were it not for the atonement wrought out by him, would forever exclude them from dwelling in the presence of God again. But in his coming and death, this commandment was fulfilled; and he instituted the Supper and commanded his followers to partake of this in all time to come, in order that they may remember him, bearing in mind that he had redeemed them, also that they had covenanted to keep his commandments and to walk with him in the regeneration. Hence it is necessary to partake of the Sacrament, as a witness to him that we do remember him, are willing to keep the commandments he has given us, that we may have his Spirit to be with us always—even to the end, and also that we may continue in the forgiveness of sins.

In various dispensations there are various differences in regard to certain requirements of the gospel. For instance, in the day of Noah, when he preached the gospel to the antediluvian world, he was given a special commandment to build an ark, that in case the people would reject him and the message sent unto them, that himself and all who believed on him might be saved from the destruction that awaited them. In this dispensation there is a principle

or commandment peculiar to it. What is that? It is the gathering the people unto one place. The gathering of this people is as necessary to be observed by believers, as faith, repentance, baptism, or any other ordinance. It is an essential part of the gospel of this dispensation, as much so as the necessity of building an ark by Noah, for his deliverance, was a part of the gospel of his dispensation. Then the world was destroyed by a flood, now it is to be destroyed by war, pestilence, famine, earthquakes, storms, and tempests, the sea rolling beyond its bounds, malarious vapors, vermin, disease, and by fire and the lightnings of God's wrath poured out for destruction upon Babylon. The cry of the angel unto the righteous of this dispensation is, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." (Rev. 18:4.)

We believe also in the principle of direct revelation from God to man.

This is a part of the gospel, but it is not peculiar to this dispensation. It is common in all ages and dispensations of the gospel. The gospel cannot be administered, nor the Church of God continue to exist, without it. Christ is the head of his Church and not man, and the connection can only be maintained upon the principle of direct and continuous revelation. It is not a hereditary principle, it cannot be handed down from father to son, nor from generation to generation, but is a living, vital principle to be enjoyed on certain conditions only, namely—through absolute faith in God and obedience to his laws and commandments. The moment this principle is cut off, that moment the Church is adrift, being severed from its ever-living head. In this condition it cannot continue, but must cease to be the Church of God, and like the ship at sea, without captain, compass or rudder, is afloat at the mercy of the storms and the waves of ever contending human passions, and worldly interests, pride and folly, finally to be wrecked upon the strand of priestcraft and superstition. The religious

world is in this condition today, ripening for the great destruction which awaits them, but there is an ark prepared for such as are worthy of eternal life, in the gathering of the Saints to the chambers of the Almighty, where they shall be preserved until the indignation of God is passed.

Marriage is also a principle or ordinance of the gospel, most vital to the happiness of mankind, however unimportant it may seem, or lightly regarded by many. There is no superfluous or unnecessary principle in the plan of life, but there is no principle of greater importance or more essential to the happiness of man—not only here, but especially hereafter, than that of marriage. Yet all are necessary. What good would it be to one to be baptized and receive not the Holy Ghost? And suppose he went a little further and received the Holy Ghost, thereby obtaining the testimony of Jesus, and then stopped at that, what good would it do him? None whatever, but would add to his condemnation, for it would be as burying his talent in the earth. To secure the fulness of the blessings, we must receive the fulness of the gospel. Yet men will be judged and rewarded according to their works. “To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” Those who receive a part of the gospel with light and knowledge to comprehend other principles, and yet do not obey them, will come under this law, hence condemnation will be added unto such, and that which they did receive may be taken from them and added to them who are more worthy.

Obedience is a requirement of heaven, and is therefore a principle of the gospel. Are all required to be obedient? Yes, all. What, against their will? O, no, not by any means. There is no power given to man, nor means lawful to be used to compel men to obey the will of God, against their wish, except persuasion and good advice, but there is a penalty attached to disobedience, which all must suffer who will not obey the obvious truths or laws of heaven. I believe in the sentiment of the poet:

“Know this, that every soul is free
 To choose his life and what he’ll be ;
 For this eternal truth is given,
 That God will force no man to heaven.

“He’ll call, persuade, direct aright,
 And bless with wisdom, love and light,
 In nameless ways be good and kind,
 But never force the human mind.”

Is it a difficult task to obey the gospel? No. It is an easy matter to those who possess the spirit of it. Most of this congregation can testify that the gospel “yoke is easy, and the burden light.” Those who have embraced it will be judged according to their works therein, whether they be good or evil. To such as are untrue to their covenants it may be said, by and by, “Depart from me!” In vain will they plead their former good works, and faith. Why? Because the race is not to the swift nor the battle always to the strong, but to him that endures faithful to the end. We must save ourselves from this untoward generation. It is a continual labor, but the strength of the righteous will be sufficient for their day. Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many mansions.” There is a glory, or mansion, of which the sun is typical, another of which the moon is typical, and still another like unto the stars, and in this latter the condition of its occupants will differ as the stars differ in appearance. Every man will receive according to his works and knowledge. “These are they who are of Paul and of Apollos, and of Cephas. These are they who say they are some of one and some of another—some of Christ and some of John, and some of Moses, and some of Elias, and some of Esaias, and some of Isaiah, and some of Enoch; but received not the gospel, neither the testimony of Jesus.” (Doc. and Cov. 76:100-1.) Thus, impartial justice will be meted out unto all, and none will be lost but the sons of perdition.—*Journal of Discourses*, Vol. 14, p. 266.