

Teaching the Gospel the Nephite Way

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The Charge: President Ezra Taft Benson

"The words and the way they are used in the Book of Mormon by the Lord should become our source of understanding and should be used by us in teaching gospel principles."

"I am deeply concerned about what we are doing to teach the Saints at all levels the gospel of Jesus Christ as completely and authoritatively as do the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. By this I mean teaching the 'great plan of the Eternal God,' to use the words of Amulek. (Alma 34:9.)"

"Are we using the messages and the method of teaching found in the Book of Mormon and other scriptures of the Restoration to teach this great plan of the Eternal God?"

"We all need to take a careful inventory of our performance and also the performance of those over whom we preside to be sure that we are teaching the 'great plan of the Eternal God' to the Saints. Are we accepting and teaching what the revelations tell us about the Creation, Adam and the fall of man, and redemption from that fall through the atonement of Christ? Do we frequently review the crucial questions which Alma asks the members of the Church in the fifth chapter of Alma in the Book of Mormon? Do we understand and are we effective in teaching and preaching the Atonement? What personal meaning does the Lord's suffering in Gethsemane and on Calvary have for each of us? What does redemption from the Fall mean to us? In the words of Alma, do we 'sing the song of redeeming love'? (Alma 5:26.)" (From *A Witness And A Warning*, p. 32-37)

What is "the Gospel"?

First, what is "the gospel"? I've heard the claim that "the gospel is all truth." Isn't it common to refer to the totality of the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as "the gospel"? How many have been confused by Joseph Smith's claim, as recorded in D&C 20:9, that the Book of Mormon contains "the fullness of the gospel"? How can it be said to contain the fullness when there is no mention of temple marriage, nothing about the Word of Wisdom, not even a discussion of the three degrees of glory. When someone, when bearing testimony, says, "I know that the *gospel* is true," what do they usually mean? Aren't they really saying, "I know that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is true"?

Chauncy Riddle, a BYU professor of philosophy, once claimed that the gospel was the best kept secret in the Church. Perhaps this "secret" status has much to do with Pres. Benson's concerns as expressed in the quotations that begin this discussion. Pres. Benson directs us to the Book of Mormon as the place to learn how to properly understand and teach this important subject. He says, "The words and the way they are used in the Book of Mormon by the Lord should become our source." And, in the Book of Mormon, the risen Christ gives us the clearest definition of this term that we find in all scripture:

"Behold I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been

lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil— And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works." (3 Nephi 27:13-15)

In other words, the *gospel* is the "good news" of the atonement of Jesus Christ. But Christ goes on in this definition to make clear that the *gospel* is more than knowledge and intellectual acceptance of the atonement:

"Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day. Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel."(3 Nephi 27:20-21)

We Must Learn and Teach the True Gospel

The importance of our teaching and emphasizing this true meaning of the gospel was stressed by Henry B. Eyring in an address to the seminary and institute instructors, together with BYU and Ricks religious educators. Brother Robert Millet describes his message:

"He talked about the challenge in teaching young people in what he described as a day when we are immersed in a sea of filth. He said there are two ways of looking at the gospel: one is the concept that the gospel is "all truth"; and another is the concept that the gospel represents the teachings, doctrines, commands, ordinances, and powers that will bring us into the Father's presence if we will apply them. And then he said that it makes great deal of difference which of these you choose and on which you place your emphasis when you teach the gospel. Why? Because young people, and older people for that matter, don't just need truth in some abstract sense. They need saving truth. Truth that will touch and stir their souls. That will make them into new creatures."

How was the Gospel Taught by the Nephites?

This study will specifically look at how the Nephites taught the core of this gospel message, the atonement. The most significant point to understand about this "Nephite way" is that they never started with the atonement.

Teaching the Gospel Must Start with the Fall

President Benson declared: "Just as a man does not really desire food until he is hungry, so he does not desire the salvation of Christ until he knows why he needs Christ." He continues, "No one adequately and properly knows why he needs Christ until he understands and accepts the doctrine of the Fall and its effect upon all mankind. And no other book in the world explains this vital doctrine nearly as well as the Book of Mormon."

President Benson describes the Nephite way of teaching: "The Book of Mormon Saints knew that the plan of redemption must start with the account of the fall of Adam. . . There are many examples of teaching this great plan, but I will quote just one. It is Mormon's summary statement of Aaron's work as a missionary:

"And it came to pass that when Aaron saw that the king would believe his words, he began from the creation of Adam, reading the scriptures unto the king—how God created man after his own image, and that God gave him commandments, and that because of transgression, man had fallen.

"And Aaron did expound unto him the scriptures from the creation of Adam, laying the fall of man before him, and their carnal state and also the plan of redemption, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, through Christ, for all whosoever would believe on his name.

"And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for their sins, through faith and repentance." (Alma 22:12-14.)

Elder Bruce R. McConkie: "the creation, the fall, and the atonement are the *Three Pillars of Eternity*"

Teaching the Fall

Orson F. Whitney: "The fall was downward but forward."

Robert Millet: "One of the interesting effects of the fall is a type of an alienation—an alienation from things of righteousness. What do we call that alienation from things of righteousness, that separation from things of righteousness, that separation from things God? What do we call it? *Spiritual death.*"

Abinadi declared that fallen man "persists in his own carnal nature" (Mosiah 16:) **Robert Millet** comments:

"It is a nature out of which we need to be extricated. . . This is the concept that comes through: you don't move from natural man to spiritual man by just living longer; you have to be changed – removed from the setting – or to use the language of the angel to Benjamin, you must 'put off' the natural man. See the concept?"

Robert Millet: "There is the fall of man with which Adam is associated with, and then there is the fall of me. Man and me. The Lord took care of the first one; I am responsible, through Christ, to see that the second is taken care of."

But, all men have the Light of Christ

Robert Millet: "The issue is not whether we have it, but to we *hearken* to it." (See 2 Nephi 2:25-25; Helaman 14:30)

Larry Dahl: "Some people aren't hard of hearing, they are just hard of hearkening."

There are two different words translated "hearken" in the OT. One means literally "to attend to, or heed"; the other means "to hear intelligently, or to obey." Used 224 times in OT; 9 times in NT (meaning, listen to me, or pay attention); 92 times in BofM (47 by Nephi and Jacob); 138 in D&C.

President Brigham Young: "There is no doubt if a person lives according to the revelations given to God's people, he may have the spirit of the Lord to signify to him his will, and to guide, and to direct him in the discharge of his duties in his temporal, as well as his spiritual exercises. I am satisfied, however, that in this respect we live far beneath our privileges."

Teaching the Atonement

President Brigham Young: "It requires all the atonement of Christ, the mercy of the Father, a pity of angels, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with us always. And then to do the very best we can to get rid of sin within us so that we may escape from this world into the celestial kingdom."

C.S. Lewis:

"But what man, in his natural condition, has not got is Spiritual life – the higher and different sort of life that exists in God.

"We use the same word life for both; but if you thought that both must be the same sort of thing, that would be like thinking that 'greatness' of space and the 'greatness' of God were the same sort of greatness. In reality, the difference between biological and

Spiritual life is so important that I am going to give them two distinct names.

"The Biological sort which comes to us through nature, and which (like everything else in nature) is always tending to run down and decay so that it can be only kept up by incessant subsidies from nature in the form of air, water, food etc., is Bios.

"The Spiritual life, which is in God from all eternity, and which made the whole universe, is Zoe.

"Bios has, to be sure, a certain shadowy or symbolic resemblance to Zoe: but only the sort of resemblance there is between a photo and a place, or a statue and a man.

"A man who changed from having Bios to having Zoe would have gone through as big a change as a statue which changed from being a carved stone to a real man.

"And that is precisely what Christianity is about. This world is a great sculptor's shop. We are the statues and there is a rumour going around that some of us are some day going to come to life." (C.S.Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1988), p.136)

Joseph Smith: "The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that he died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it."

Elder Boyd K. Packer: The atonement and its resulting placement of Jesus Christ as a merciful mediator between God and man "is the very heart of Christian doctrine. You may know much about the gospel as it branches out from there, but if you only know the branches and those branches do not touch the root, if they have been cut free from that truth, there will be no life nor substance nor redemption in them."

Jacob: (How the Nephites Taught the Atonement)

"For I know that ye have searched much, many of you, to know of things to come; wherefore I know that ye know that our flesh must waste away and die; nevertheless, in our bodies we shall see God. Yea, I know that ye know that in the body he shall show himself unto those at Jerusalem, from whence we came; for it is expedient that it should be among them; for it behooveth the great Creator that he suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh, and die for all men, that all men might become subject unto him. For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord. Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement--save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more.

"O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more. And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself; yea, to that being who beguiled our first parents, who transformeth himself nigh unto an angel of light, and stirreth up the children of men unto secret combinations of murder and all manner of secret works of darkness.

"O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit. And because of the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel, this death, of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall deliver up its dead; which death is the grave. And this death of which I have spoken, which is the spiritual death, shall deliver up its dead; which spiritual death is hell; wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other; and it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel.

"O how great the plan of our God! For on the other hand, the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the body of the

righteous; and the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible, and immortal, and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh, save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect. Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness.

"And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment-seat of the Holy One of Israel; and then cometh the judgment, and then must they be judged according to the holy judgment of God. And assuredly, as the Lord liveth, for the Lord God hath spoken it, and it is his eternal word, which cannot pass away, that **they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still**; wherefore, they who are filthy are the devil and his angels; and they shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for them; and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever and has no end.

"O the greatness and the justice of our God! For he executeth all his words, and they have gone forth out of his mouth, and his law must be fulfilled. But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in the Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever.

"O the greatness of the mercy of our God, the Holy One of Israel! For he delivereth his saints from that awful monster the devil, and death, and hell, and that lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.

"O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it. And he cometh into the world that he may **save all men** if they will hearken unto his voice; for behold, **he suffereth the pains of all men, yea, the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam.** And he suffereth this that the **resurrection might pass upon all men,** that all might stand before him at the great and judgment day.

"And 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.** And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, **and endure to the end,** they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it. Wherefore, he has given a law; and **where there is no law given there is no punishment;** and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him. **For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them,** that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel.

"O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. Remember that his paths are righteous. **Behold, the way for man is narrow, but it lieth in a straight course** before him, and the keeper of the gate is the Holy One of Israel; and he employeth no servant there; and there is none other way save it be by the gate; for he cannot be deceived, for the Lord God is his name. And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches--yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them. But the things of the wise and the prudent shall be hid from them forever--yea, that happiness which is prepared for the saints.

"O, my beloved brethren, turn away from your sins; shake off the chains of him that would bind you fast; come unto that God who is the rock of your salvation. Prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered unto the righteous, even the day of judgment, that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim: Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty--but I know my guilt; I transgressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine; and the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery.

"Come, my brethren, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and

without price. Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy. Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness. Behold, my beloved brethren, remember the words of your God; pray unto him continually by day, and give thanks unto his holy name by night. Let your hearts rejoice. (2 Nephi 9:4-26, 41-43, 45-46, 50-52)

Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants, often called, "*The Vision*," was an unusual revelation in that it was seen simultaneously by both Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. The revelation as we have it recorded in Section 76 was actually written by Sidney Rigdon. However, Joseph, as an answer to poetic response from W. W. Phelps, wrote his own version of this revelation. He titled it simply, "**A Vision**." Note particularly the scope of Christ's ministry as described by the Prophet in stanzas 19 and 20.

We Must Also Bear Testimony

President Benson: "Now, after we teach the great plan of the Eternal God, we must personally bear our testimonies of its truthfulness. Alma, after giving a great message to the Saints about being born again and the need for them to experience a 'mighty change' in their hearts, sealed his teaching with his testimony in these words:

"And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true. And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety?"

"Behold, I say unto you they are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me. (Alma 5:45-46.)"