

The Father and the Son

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At the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its power to save is a correct understanding of the Father and the Son.

My beloved brothers and sisters, I am grateful to address you this afternoon in the setting of this inspiring general conference!

In addressing a topic that to my mind is most sacred, I wish first to acknowledge with gratitude the devotion of so many Christians throughout the ages, including my ancestry of French Protestants and Irish Catholics. Because of their faith and worship of God, many of them sacrificed position, possessions, and even their lives in defense of their God and their faith.¹

As Latter-day Saints and as Christians, we likewise have a strong and deep faith in God the Eternal Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Devotion to God ever remains a sacred and personal matter between each of us and our Maker.

Our quest for eternal life is nothing other than a quest to understand who God is and for us to return to live with Him. The Savior prayed to His Father, “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”²

Even in the light of this declaration by our Savior Himself, the prevailing view of the nature of the Father and the Son throughout the many centuries and among much of mankind is clearly inconsistent with the teachings of the holy scriptures.

We respectfully submit that at the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its power to save is a correct understanding of the Father and the Son.³

The importance of this most fundamental principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ is confirmed by the First Vision of the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1820. The Prophet wrote: “I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*”⁴

This experience by the boy Joseph, followed by many other visions and revelations, reveals that God actually exists; the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, are two separate and distinct beings; man is created in the image of God; our Heavenly Father is literally the Father of Jesus Christ; God continues to reveal Himself to man; God is ever near and interested in us; and He answers our prayers.

Even though similar appearances of the Father and the Son in holy writ are relatively rare, the remarkable fact of the First Vision is that it agrees so well with other recorded events in the holy scriptures.

In the New Testament, for example, we read of Stephen's final testimony at his martyrdom. Said he, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."⁵

While in mighty vision on the Isle of Patmos, the Apostle John sees the "Lord God Almighty"⁶ as well as the Lamb of God, who "redeemed us ... by [His] blood."⁷

In the Book of Mormon, the doctrine of the Father and the Son stands in majestic testimony alongside the Holy Bible. The Book of Mormon records the visitation of our Savior to the Nephites, in which the voice of the Father, in the presence of some 2,500 Nephites, introduces the risen Christ: "Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name—hear ye him."⁸

In the four Gospels, Christ Himself refers to His Father in Heaven 160 times, while during His brief three-day ministry among the Nephites, as recorded in the Book of Mormon, He mentions His Father 122 times.

For example, in Matthew, Jesus says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of *my Father* which is in heaven."⁹

In John, He testifies, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth *the Father* do."¹⁰

And in Luke, He exclaims, "*Father*, into thy hands I commend my spirit."¹¹

Every time our Lord refers to His Heavenly Father, He does so with the utmost reverence and submissiveness.

In saying this, I hope there will be no misunderstanding. Jesus Christ is the great Jehovah, the God of Israel, the promised Messiah, and because of His infinite Atonement, He is our Savior and the Redeemer of the world. Of Him the Apostle Paul declared, "Then cometh the end, when [Christ] shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when [Christ] shall have put down all rule and all authority and power."¹²

On the eve of the Savior's Atonement, He offered up His great Intercessory Prayer to His Father. He prayed:

"Neither pray I for these [in other words, His Apostles] alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

"That they all may be *one*; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be *one in us*: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

"And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one."¹³

The Father and the Son are distinctly separate beings, but They are perfectly united and one in power and purpose. Their oneness is not reserved for Them alone; rather, They desire this same oneness for everyone who will, with devotion, follow and obey Their commandments.

How is the earnest seeker of God able to become acquainted with the Father and the Son? Our Savior promised, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, ... shall teach you all things."¹⁴

In the Book of Mormon, Nephi, when speaking of the doctrine of Christ, declared that the Holy Ghost "witnesses

of the Father and the Son.”¹⁵

It is true that the power or influence of the Holy Ghost may on occasion be felt, according to the will of the Lord, by any person irrespective of that person’s religious persuasion. But the full measure, or gift, of the Holy Ghost comes only after a person has received, with “a broken heart and a contrite spirit,”¹⁶ the ordinances of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost¹⁷ by the laying on of hands. These and other sacred ordinances may be performed only under the direction and power of the priesthood of God. In this regard, we are taught:

“And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.

“Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.”¹⁸

Seen in its true light, the doctrine of the Father and the Son is the doctrine of the eternal family. Every human being has existed previously as a spirit child with heavenly parents,¹⁹ with Christ being the Firstborn of the Father in this heavenly family.²⁰

So it is with all of us. We are the children of our Heavenly Father.

President Ezra Taft Benson with prophetic insight said, “Nothing is going to startle us more when we pass through the veil to the other side than to realize how well we know our Father [in Heaven] and how familiar his face is to us.”²¹

I have learned that it is not possible to convey in the language of man those things which are made known only by the Holy Ghost and power of God. It is in this spirit that I bear my solemn witness and testimony of the reality, nearness, and goodness of our Eternal Father and His holy Son, Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity, Volume 1: Beginnings to 1500*, rev. ed. (1975) and *A History of Christianity, Volume 2: Reformation to the Present*, rev. ed. (1975); see also Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (2003).

2. John 17:3.

3. See *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 38–44.

4. Joseph Smith—History 1:17.

5. Acts 7:56.

6. Revelation 4:8.

7. Revelation 5:9.

8. 3 Nephi 11:7.

9. Matthew 7:21; emphasis added.

10. John 5:19; emphasis added.

11. Luke 23:46; emphasis added.

12. 1 Corinthians 15:24. For further understanding of the Savior and His mission, see “The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Apr. 2000, 2–3.

13. John 17:20–22; emphasis added.

14. John 14:26.

15. 2 Nephi 31:18.

16. 3 Nephi 9:20; Moroni 6:2.

17. See John 3:5; 3 Nephi 11:31–38.

18. Doctrine and Covenants 84:19–20.

19. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.

20. See Colossians 1:15; Doctrine and Covenants 93:21.

21. Ezra Taft Benson, “Jesus Christ—Gifts and Expectations,” in *Speeches of the Year, 1974* (1975), 313; see also “Jesus Christ—Gifts and Expectations,” *Ensign*, Dec. 1988, 6; *Tambuli*, May 1977, 24.