

The Doctrine of Christ

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The doctrine of Christ allows us to access the spiritual power that will lift us from our current spiritual state to a state where we can become perfected.

Jesus's visit to the Nephites after His Resurrection was carefully organized to teach us the things of greatest importance. It began with the Father testifying to the people that Jesus was His "Beloved Son, in whom [He was] well pleased."¹ Then Jesus Himself descended and testified of His atoning sacrifice,² inviting the people to "know of a surety" that He was the Christ by coming forth and feeling the wound mark in His side and the prints of the nails in His hands and feet.³ These testimonies established without doubt that Jesus's Atonement was complete and that the Father had fulfilled His covenant to provide a Savior. Jesus then taught the Nephites how to obtain all the blessings of the Father's plan of happiness, which are made available to us because of the Savior's Atonement, by teaching them the doctrine of Christ.⁴

My message today focuses on the doctrine of Christ. The scriptures define the doctrine of Christ as exercising faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, repenting, being baptized, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end.⁵

The Doctrine of Christ Allows Us to Obtain the Blessings of Christ's Atonement

The Atonement of Christ creates the conditions upon which we may rely upon "the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah,"⁶ "be perfected in [Christ],"⁷ obtain every good thing,⁸ and gain eternal life.⁹

The doctrine of Christ on the other hand is the means—the only means—by which we can obtain all of the blessings made available to us through Jesus's Atonement. It is the doctrine of Christ that allows us to access the spiritual power that will lift us from our current spiritual state to a state where we can become perfected like the Savior.¹⁰ Of this process of rebirth, Elder D. Todd Christofferson has taught: "Being born again, unlike our physical birth, is more a process than an event. And engaging in that process is the central purpose of mortality."¹¹

Let's explore each element of the doctrine of Christ.

First, faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement. The prophets have taught that faith begins by hearing the word of Christ.¹² The words of Christ testify of His atoning

sacrifice and tell us how we may obtain forgiveness, blessings, and exaltation.¹³

Upon hearing the words of Christ, we exercise faith by choosing to follow the teachings and example of the Savior.¹⁴ To do this, Nephi taught that we must rely “wholly upon the merits of [Christ,] who is mighty to save.”¹⁵ Because Jesus was a God in the premortal existence,¹⁶ lived a sinless life,¹⁷ and during His Atonement satisfied all the demands of justice for you and me,¹⁸ He has the power and keys to bring about the resurrection of all men,¹⁹ and He made it possible for mercy to overpower justice upon conditions of repentance.²⁰ Once we understand that we can obtain mercy through Christ’s merits, we are able to “have faith unto repentance.”²¹ To rely wholly upon Christ’s merits then is to trust that He did what was necessary to save us and then to act upon our belief.²²

Faith also causes us to stop worrying so much about what others think of us and begin to care far more about what God thinks of us.

Second, repentance. Samuel the Lamanite taught, “If ye believe on [Christ’s] name ye will repent of all your sins.”²³ Repentance is a precious gift from our Heavenly Father that is made possible through the sacrifice of His Only Begotten Son. It is the process that the Father has given us by which we change, or turn, our thoughts, actions, and our very being so that we become more and more like the Savior.²⁴ It is not just for big sins but is a daily process of self-evaluation and improvement²⁵ that helps us to overcome our sins, our imperfections, our weaknesses, and our inadequacies.²⁶ Repentance causes us to become “true followers” of Christ, which fills us with love²⁷ and casts out our fears.²⁸ Repentance is not a backup plan just in case our plan to live perfectly fails.²⁹ Continual repentance is the only path that can bring us lasting joy and enable us to return to live with our Heavenly Father.

Through repentance we become submissive and obedient to God’s will. Now, this is not done alone. A recognition of God’s goodness and our nothingness,³⁰ combined with our best efforts to align our behavior with God’s will,³¹ brings grace into our lives.³² Grace “is divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ ... to do good works that [we] otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to [our] own means.”³³ Because repentance is really about becoming like the Savior, which is impossible on our own, we desperately need the Savior’s grace in order to make necessary changes in our lives.

As we repent, we replace our old, unrighteous behaviors, weaknesses, imperfections, and fears with new behaviors and beliefs that draw us closer to the Savior and help us to become like Him.

Third, baptism and the sacrament. The prophet Mormon taught that “the first fruits of repentance is baptism.”³⁴ To be complete, repentance must be combined with the ordinance of baptism administered by someone who holds the priesthood authority of God. For members of the Church, the covenants made at baptism and other occasions are renewed as we partake of the sacrament.³⁵

In the ordinances of baptism and the sacrament, we covenant to keep the commandments of the Father and the Son, always remember Christ, and be willing to take Christ's name (or His work and attributes³⁶) upon us.³⁷ The Savior, in return, covenants to forgive, or remit, our sins³⁸ and "pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon [us]."³⁹ Christ also promises to prepare us for eternal life by helping us become like Him.⁴⁰

Douglas D. Holmes, First Counselor in the Young Men General Presidency, has written: "The ordinances of baptism and the sacrament symbolize both the end result and process of being born again. In baptism, we bury the old man of flesh and come forth to a newness of life."⁴¹ In the sacrament, we learn that this change is a step-by-step process, [where] little by little, week by week, we are transformed as we repent, covenant, and through increased endowments of the Spirit [become like the Savior]."⁴²

Ordinances and covenants are essential within the doctrine of Christ. It is through worthily receiving the ordinances of the priesthood and keeping the associated covenants that the power of godliness is manifest in our lives.⁴³ Elder D. Todd Christofferson explained that "this 'power of godliness' comes in the person and by the influence of the Holy Ghost."⁴⁴

Fourth, the gift of the Holy Ghost. After baptism we are given the gift of the Holy Ghost through the ordinance of confirmation.⁴⁵ This gift, if we receive it, allows us to have the constant companionship of a God⁴⁶ and continual access to the grace that inherently comes with His influence.

As our constant companion, the Holy Ghost gives us additional power or strength to keep our covenants.⁴⁷ He also sanctifies us,⁴⁸ which means to make us "free from sin, pure, clean, and holy through the atonement of Jesus Christ."⁴⁹ The process of sanctification not only cleanses us, but it also endows us with needed spiritual gifts or divine attributes of the Savior⁵⁰ and changes our very nature,⁵¹ such "that we have no more disposition to do evil."⁵² Each time we receive the Holy Ghost into our lives through faith, repentance, ordinances, Christlike service, and other righteous endeavors, we are changed until step by step, little by little we become like Christ.⁵³

Fifth, enduring to the end. The prophet Nephi taught that after receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, we must "endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God."⁵⁴ Elder Dale G. Renlund described the process of enduring to the end as follows: "We may be perfected by repeatedly and iteratively ... exercising faith in [Christ], repenting, partaking of the sacrament to renew the covenants and blessings of baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost as a constant companion to a greater degree. As we do so, we become more like Christ and are able to endure to the end, with all that that entails."⁵⁵

In other words, the reception of the Holy Ghost and the change that reception creates in us further builds our faith. Increased faith leads to additional repentance. As we

then symbolically sacrifice our hearts and our sins upon the sacrament altar, we receive the Holy Ghost to a greater degree. Receiving the Holy Ghost to a greater degree further moves us along the path of being born again. As we continue in this process and obtain all the saving ordinances and covenants of the gospel, we receive “grace for grace” until we receive a fulness.⁵⁶

We Must Apply the Doctrine of Christ in Our Lives

Brothers and sisters, as we apply the doctrine of Christ in our lives, we are blessed both temporally and spiritually, even in trials. Eventually we are able to “lay hold upon every good thing.”⁵⁷ I testify that this process has happened and continues to happen in my own life, step by step, little by little.

But more importantly, we must apply the doctrine of Christ in our lives because it provides the only path back to our Heavenly Father. It is the only way to receive the Savior and become His sons and daughters.⁵⁸ In fact, the only way to be redeemed from sin and progress spiritually is to apply the doctrine of Christ in our lives.⁵⁹ Alternatively, the Apostle John taught that “whosoever ... abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.”⁶⁰ And Jesus Himself told the Nephite Twelve that if we fail to exercise faith in Christ, repent, be baptized, and endure to the end, we will be “hewn down and cast into the fire, from whence [we] can no more return.”⁶¹

So how can we apply the doctrine of Christ more fully in our lives? One way would be to make a conscious effort each week to prepare for the sacrament by taking some time to prayerfully consider where we most need to improve. We could then bring a sacrifice of at least one thing that keeps us from being like Jesus Christ to the sacrament altar, pleading in faith for help, asking for necessary spiritual gifts, and covenanting to improve during the coming week.⁶² As we do so, the Holy Ghost will come into our lives to a greater degree, and we will have additional strength to overcome our imperfections.

I testify that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world and that His is the only name by which we can be saved.⁶³ All things that are good are made available only through Him.⁶⁴ But to actually “lay hold upon every good thing,”⁶⁵ including eternal life, we must continually apply the doctrine of Christ in our lives. In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.