

Fundamentals of the Fullness of the Gospel



**Four keys to Understanding the
Unchanging Gospel of Jesus
Christ**

There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—

And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.

D&C 130:20-21

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The Gospel is Eternal and Unchanging

“The Gospel has always been the same;”¹ stated Joseph Smith. But since his day some have argued that doctrines can and do change. To them what is true today, might not be true tomorrow. Yet the scriptures teach us that truth itself “is a knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come.”² This has not stopped some from believing however that the Gospel varies from age to age with technology and fashions.

Let us consider an example of how views of the Gospel and acceptance of it might change while its principles remain the same. Let us suppose that a prophet of God taught a true doctrine from the pulpit in General Conference over a hundred years ago. His words were recorded, and he had the chance to review them and correct them before publication if necessary. He repeated the same teaching at least two dozen times in public, all recorded by stenographers as well as in private councils of which we have minutes and diary entries. What he said on each occasion was consistent, and he referred to what he imparted as a doctrine, a revelation, and what his predecessor also taught. Not only that, he told the Saints that their salvation was dependent upon their acceptance or rejection of it.

Now what if, over the passage of time, this doctrine became downplayed, perhaps initially because of wanting to put the focus on other principles that seem more important to understand or

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Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 264. This quote is so succinct and so powerful that it was thought superfluous to include any – of the many – others on the subject. For scriptural substantiation see Ps 89:34; Eccl 3:14; Matt 5:18; Morm 9:19 & D&C 29:34.

² D&C 93:24

teach. Maybe it became a mystery to most of the Saints and ultimately too controversial for many of them to give it much credence. In such a situation what has changed? Is the doctrine still true? Do we ultimately still have to accept it, and are we still responsible if we reject it?

Let us take this scenario even further, to a hundred years after the doctrine was first proclaimed and to a time in which the teaching has become almost an embarrassment, as anti-Mormons now use it to attack the Church for no longer teaching it, and some members – seeking to defend the faith – argue that it is misunderstood, or was not taught at all. Imagine in such a situation even General Authorities discounting the doctrine, and ultimately one of them, perhaps even the President of the Church, calling it - or the anti-Mormon understanding of it – a false theory.

This might lead many members to conclude not to study the real doctrine at all and to look on those few who still believed it as dubious if not heretics. Some overzealous Bishops and Stake Presidents, who believe they are trying to uphold the interests of the Church, might even consider excommunicating those whose only crime is accepting the teachings of the prophets, and sharing their testimony with their friends. While those few who do learn that the doctrine was indeed taught might think that the Church President who taught it at best knew less than his successors, had mistaken a false doctrine for a true one, or had taught a false doctrine, and may have become a fallen prophet.

But if they believe this one prophet fell and taught falsely, then this undermines their faith in his successors too, including the current leader, because they derived their authority through him. What guarantee do they have that the living president is any more correct or understands doctrine any better? What prevents the next president of the church from changing doctrine again? Were we to assume this is possible we must consider ourselves in a state of perpetual error and confusion because even if a prophet "corrects" an error of his predecessor we must presume this to be in error also

if a future leader "corrects" the facts again. Nothing then can be certain and all faith would be meaningless.

Thus the anti-Mormons have served their mission well, they have turned a true doctrine into an embarrassment, then a theory, and eventually something which may damn people for refusing to take it seriously and study it, or to condemn it prematurely without having done so.

This is one example of the folly of believing that the Gospel can change. The Gospel stands unchanged throughout time, and the Saints acceptance or rejection of it varies from age to age, but the blessings and rewards for believing and living it always remain available to us, even if most of the Saints do not accept some of them. If truth is unchanging, and "Mormonism is truth" as Joseph Smith proclaimed, then our only safe course is following that same truth that existed from the days of Adam to the present. This truth was even published by the Church only a few decades ago:

To say that the Gospel may be changed is to say that God has changed, ... It is obvious therefore that no one can change the Gospel, and that if they attempt to do so, they only set up a man-made system which is not the Gospel, but is merely a reflection of their own views. And since only God can save, only His Gospel can save, and if we substitute "any other gospel" there is no salvation in it."³

³ LDS Church News, 5 June 1965, p. 16

True Prophets do not Contradict One Another

Along with the concept of an unchanging Gospel there are other principles inexorably linked which follow on logically and are cornerstones which uphold our religious foundations. The next one of these we will treat is the simple truth that true prophets teach true doctrines, and true prophets do not conflict with each other in their teachings on such doctrines.

Prophets can and have expressed opinions throughout time. Even within the scriptures a few of the personal views of the Apostles and prophets who wrote them have been included. Paul for example spoke of his personal “judgment” on a particular matter on which the Lord had not revealed His commandment,⁴ and in another passage he made it clear that he was speaking rather than the Lord.⁵ Likewise the Nephite authors of the *Book of Mormon* spoke of their imperfections and weaknesses of language that they hoped would not prejudice their future readers against their accounts.⁶

There is a broad difference though between a personal view, or a moment of speculation, and a Prophet saying something is the word or the will of the Lord. When they proclaim a truth, an unalterable fact of the Gospel and the nature of God, they set up a standard by which other teachings are to be judged and by which we will be judged according to our acceptance or rejection. The Lord gave us the privilege and responsibility of gaining from Him a spiritual witness of such doctrines, but whether we feel our prayers are answered negatively or affirmatively, if at all, does not alter what has been revealed.

⁴ 1 Cor. 7:25

⁵ 1 Cor. 7:12

⁶ 1 Ne. 19:6; 2 Ne. 33:4,11; Omni 1:20; Mormon 8:17; 9:31; Ether 12:23-25; see D&C 1:25

The scriptures or “standard works” as we call them are testaments, not only of God’s dealing with His children, but of thousands of years of truths revealed to us that have stood the test of time. They are the ultimate measure of truth. While science books may change yearly to keep up with the different theories of scientists, the precepts found in God’s word have never been altered just as God’s purposes have not.

Everyone, from the humblest Saint to the President of the Church should have their words subjected to the test of being compared to those of the scriptural cannon. Joseph Smith himself gave the warning that, “If any man writes to you, or preaches to you, doctrines contrary to the Bible, or Book of Mormon, or the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, set him down as an impostor.”⁷ He did not exclude himself from being liable to such a comparison, and challenged the world, “If any man will prove to me by one passage of holy writ, one item I believe to be false, I will renounce it and disclaim it as far as I have promulgated it.”⁸

Thus we see even a prophet of God is subject to his predecessors in matters of doctrine. He cannot hope to tear away the foundation they built and hope to have some firm ground left to stand upon himself. He derives his authority from them, and his knowledge of the Gospel too. He cannot undermine them without undermining his own position, and if he removes himself from them on matters of doctrine in this life, he could find himself outside the heavenly home they enjoy in the eternities.

In spite of this, one modern LDS General Authority erroneously taught that “revelation is what Joseph Smith says unless Spencer W. Kimball says otherwise!”⁹ Such talk, even by a good man in a position of authority is still nonsense. God is not any more dependent or subject to any President of the church than He was upon the Prophet Joseph. Declaring the sky to be purple will not

⁷ Joseph Smith, *Times and Seasons* 5:490

⁸ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 327

⁹ S. Dilworth Young, *BYU fireside*, 5 May 1974

change it from blue. God's revelations are not subject to acceptance in order to be true.

Likewise all priesthood holders are dependent upon the Lord, and their predecessors. Under the direction of God, it was Joseph Smith who laid the foundations of this dispensation of the Gospel, who presides over the keys of the Priesthood in these last days, who precedes all of his successors, and who will ultimately judge those who came after him in whatever office they hold.

To suppose that Joseph Smith (to whom God chose to restore the Gospel, who was visited, taught and given authority by the greatest prophets of all time and Jesus Himself) could be superseded by anyone who derived their authority from him would be to lay the axe at the root of the tree on whose branches they sit. Just as a stream can rise no higher than the fountain from which it springs, so too no one can hope to continue along the same stream for long by trying to cut off themselves from the source of the river from which they sprang.

Joseph Smith himself had this warning for those who would try to disregard his mission and the revelations revealed through him, “if any man preach any other gospel than that which I have preached he shall be cursed.”¹⁰ In saying this he was but paraphrasing the words his own predecessor, the Apostle Paul gave in his epistle to the Galatians, in which he warned that even if “an angel from heaven”¹¹ shall preach contrary to the Gospel, that he should be disregarded. The Prophet concurred, and instructed the Saints that angels (as well as men) could be judged to be false if they were “contradicting a former revelation”¹²

¹⁰ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 368

¹¹ Gal. 1:8

¹² Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 214

The Saving Ordinances Cannot be Altered or Discarded

One of the visible outward signs of our willingness to commit to the revelations of God and to accept His authority in our lives is to receive the ordinances of the Gospel. This shows God and witnesses on earth and heaven that we are willing to take steps forward, to show greater devotion, and take on more responsibilities. It also opens the way to receive greater blessings.

As we see in the sacrament and baptism, many ordinances have specific words that must be *spoken exactly* to be considered valid. Baptism must also be performed in a certain way. Each of the words we use carries with it great meaning, and the actions we use to carry out the ordinance display a powerful symbolism. Performing an ordinance in its prescribed manner also shows we recognize the commandments of God in how we should perform it and that we are looking to Him to recognize our administrations. Obedience to these commandments is just as necessary as having the proper authority to perform the ordinance. In fact failing to perform all necessary ordinances properly is a sign that the authority has been lost

Joseph Smith stated:

"Ordinances instituted in the heavens before the foundation of the world, in the priesthood, for the salvation of men, are not to be altered or changed. All must be saved on the same principles.

"It is for the same purpose that God gathers together His people in the last days, to build unto the Lord a house to prepare them for the ordinances and endowments, washings and anointings, etc. . . .

"If a man gets a fullness of the priesthood of God he has to get it in the same way that Jesus Christ obtained it, and that was by

keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord. Where there is no change of priesthood, there is no change of ordinances."¹³

Some would argue that some wording or symbolism is outdated and, that such ordinances should be updated, that we should conform to ways the world can more easily accept and understand. This is not a new argument. Doubtless some of the early Christian leaders with the best intent in the world realized the difficulties of sometimes performing baptism by immersion. They probably reasoned that some people lived too far away from enough water or that others might seem too old or sick to immerse in such a manner. So they began making exceptions for a few potential converts until it reached the point that it seemed so much more convenient to sprinkle everyone instead of baptizing them. Then someone may have suggested, “why wait until people are adults to baptize them? Life is short, and it would be terrible for someone to miss the opportunity.” Such views eventually took hold until a point was reached where the qualifications for, wording of, meaning and purpose of baptism were lost, along with any power or recognition from the heavens. These administrations, even when performed by one who had been properly ordained were not recognized by God, and the great apostasy was the result.

There are many other ordinances that require a specific pattern to be followed. The rites of the Endowment ceremony are included in this. Although the Prophet Joseph received these sacred temple ordinances and instructions “line upon line” as they were revealed unto him, he considered it absolutely essential that they be carried out as God intended them, so that they might be fully efficacious. During the last days of his life, with the Nauvoo temple still unfinished, Joseph realized that he would not be able to carry out the Endowment fully in line with God’s designs, and so he put this responsibility upon his successor, Brigham Young, telling him, “we have done the best we could under the circumstances in which

¹³ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 308

we are placed, and I wish you to take this matter in hand and organize and systematize all these ceremonies.”¹⁴

Despite this, there was no doubt that the Endowment – once carried out in its full form – was to remain unchanged, and in 1877 President Young finished recording the ceremony and pronounced it “perfect”. There was also no argument at the time over whether it ever could be changed, the Prophet had made it clear that, “The order of the House of God has been and ever will be the same, even after Christ comes ...”¹⁵

Yet, less than fifty years later, Stephen L. Richards, a member of the Council of the Twelve, stating in General Conference, “I hold it entirely compatible, with the genius of the Church to change its forms of procedure, customs and *ordinances* in accordance with our own knowledge and experience. I would not discard an old practice merely because it is old, but only after it has outworn its usefulness.” He pointed out “that some changes in the *ordinances*, forms and methods of the Church” had been made and that some of these changes had “disturbed some of the members.” But, “Personally, I approve of those changes and hope the general authorities will be led to make others as changing conditions warrant.”¹⁶

He was speaking after alterations had first been made to the Endowment, such as removing teachings relating to the identity of God, and taking symbols and parts away from the sacred Priesthood garment. His words were not challenged publicly by any other General Authorities, and those who did object were silenced by the church, so the changes to ordinances continued. Some ordinances were even omitted completely.

The most drastic changes to the Endowment occurred during the 1980s, when the most sacred rite to bring us into the presence of

¹⁴ Joseph Smith quoted in L. John Nuttall Journal, Vol. 1, pp. 18-19

¹⁵ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 91

¹⁶ Salt Lake Tribune, 10 April 1932 *emphasis mine*

God was taken away, along with many other ‘keys’ to unlock the heavens. Most recently the washing and anointing ordinances have been taken away, and a new "symbolic" ordinance substituted. This change was identical to the change in a previous dispensation to omit baptism by immersion in favor of a "symbolic" immersion by sprinkling.

In the process sacred symbolism was also lost, along with it much of the understanding of what the Endowment means and how it relates to our lives. Thus only those aware of this situation, and who know those with the knowledge and authority to administer the Endowment as revealed by God can receive it in its fullness, whereas many of the Saints only know rites and ordinances which carry lesser understanding, power, recognition and glory in heaven.

Joseph Smith taught, God “set the ordinances to be the same forever and ever,”¹⁷ and, “Ordinances instituted in heaven before the foundation of this world in the Priesthood for the salvation of man, are not to be altered or changed.”¹⁸

God may reward us for our faith and for those things we do with the right intent, but it will never be the same or a substitute for doing exactly as He expects us to in conforming specifically with His requirements. We cannot claim the same reward as those who have complied with all that God has restored, in the form and manner in which He restored it.

¹⁷ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 168

¹⁸ Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 308

The Requirements for Exaltation do Not Vary

God did not give us any unnecessary ordinances or commandments, and those which He has stated are essential to exaltation cannot be discarded. Some point to the Mosaic law as an example of how God gave different groups of people different requirements, but they fail to understand that the Lord gave the ancient Israelites a lesser law, because they were unworthy or incapable of fully living the Gospel. The Law of Moses is called a schoolmaster,¹⁹ because it was not the higher law, it was only designed to lead them to it. Yet even then there were a few amongst them, such as Moses himself and the seventy elders of Israel, that were able to come into the presence of God and were able to live all the laws necessary to qualify for their exaltation.

Now let us suppose a similar scenario in which the majority of the Saints prove themselves unworthy or are perhaps unwilling to live a law of God. Perhaps the persecutions against them seem too much, or the standards of the world are so different. Maybe earthly laws are enacted against them.

Indeed the Lord might bear with them for a while because of the hazards of the times. He may be patient with them and understanding of their challenges. But this does not mean He will offer them the same celestial reward as those who live such a law despite the problems associated with it. Nor does it mean that those who do not live it can claim the same reward as those who did, despite the circumstances.

God would be unjust if he required such a sacrifice of His people in one age but not in another. Yet some have said, "I'm glad I don't have to live Celestial Marriage, gather to Zion, or live the United Order." They believe they are excused because of civil law, or because the majority of the other Saints have taken a different

¹⁹ Gal. 3:24-25

course. But God “doth not vary from that which he hath said.”²⁰ The requirements for exaltation are eternal, and existed long before we came to earth, as was revealed to the Prophet:

“There is a law irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated – and when we receive any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated.”²¹

“The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated,”²² the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith, just as He promised to Nephi that He gave no commandment without preparing a way that it could be lived.²³ Some lack faith in those promises or look for excuses not to live commandments they consider too awkward. Others are perhaps unaware of how the Lord has continued the Gospel in its fullness, and when they learn of it will realize how God’s will and prophecies are still being fulfilled.

Celestial Marriage is one of those essential requirements, which existed “before the foundation of the world.”²⁴ In fact it is from the revelation on this law in the Doctrine in Covenants that “exaltation”²⁵ was first revealed, such is the importance of this commandment. Consecration, is another essential requirement, it too has been changed and denied. Thus we see the association between the fundamental principles of an unchanging Gospel, unalterable ordinances, and the unvarying requirements of exaltation. We also see how attacks on such doctrines and laws actually are an attack on much simpler, more fundamental precepts

²⁰ D&C 3:2

²¹ D&C 130:20-21

²² D&C 3:1

²³ 1 Ne. 3:7

²⁴ D&C 132:5,63

²⁵ In fact the word: "Exaltation" appears only in the following verses. In all of scripture the only references to personal exaltation are in the revelation on Celestial Plural Marriage: D&C 132:17,19,22,23,26,29,37,39,49,57,63

that make up the foundations of the principles we believe as Christians and Latter-day Saints.

Yet there will always be those who believe they are defending the faith, who may be eager to please their leaders, who are reluctant to offend the world, or who are unaware of these issues. They may condemn such changes in ancient times as apostasy, and argue such changes then showed a need for a restoration of the Gospel. Yet they look upon such changes now as evidence of the existence of 'revelation,' and will feel duty bound as a good Church member to sustain them. This easier road only leads to a lesser glory. Those who have studied a little deeper and are prepared to sacrifice a little more will rely on God who says, "I the Lord am everlasting, and my everlasting covenants cannot be abrogated nor done away with; but they stand forever. . . . I the Lord do not change, and my word and my covenants do not."²⁶

If your intent is to serve God with all your "might, mind, and strength" you will inevitably have to choose whether to obey these commandments, and seek the fullness of the ordinances and the priesthood that administers them or to fall short of the glory of God.

I exhort you in the name of Jesus Christ, to come unto him, gather with other saints who are striving to live all of these commandments, and receive all that the father has in store for you.

The fullness of the keys of the priesthood, and all the ordinances are still available to you. You can ask those who gave you this booklet to give you more information about the fullness of the gospel. The doors of sacred temples stand open to all those who worthily prepare themselves today as if they are saying:

²⁶ This Quote is from a revelation to John Taylor, 26 September 1886. it can be found in: Unpublished Revelations 88:3-6 or Addendum to the D&C 7:3-6

"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."²⁷

²⁷ 2 Ne 9:50

Have you ever desired to live the fullness of the gospel? Do you look forward to building the city of the New Jerusalem? If so we invite you to gather with us and establish Zion.

If you will allow the spirit to work in you, you will come to know how you can best serve God, whether that is gathered with us or on your own unique foreordained mission. If you have a desire to serve God, then I exhort you to pray fervently to know if this gathering, preparatory to the establishment of the New Jerusalem, is the place God wants you and your family to gather and labor for his kingdom.

For further information visit

www.ChristsChurchTheBranch.org

Or please contact the missionaries at:
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If we are too busy meeting with others to meet with you right away, or if the number on the back of this booklet is busy when you call, I hope that you will try again. Please remember: "seek and ye shall find, knock and the door will open."

