

“The Doctrine of Christ”

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I am honored and humbled to be here to share these few moments with you. I am honored because it has been my privilege to be a faculty member at this very special place for 41 years. I am humbled because I feel that during those years I have been associated with some of the finest young people in the world. I hope that you can hear and feel my heart when I say that I genuinely care about your well-being and have earnestly asked for the Lord’s blessing to be with us this morning. I pray that we might communicate by and feel the affirmation of the Spirit of the Lord as we visit about some important teachings of the Book of Mormon and how they have personal application in our lives today. There is much that I would like to say, so I would ask for your very best efforts as we visit together.

During my years on the faculty I have had the privilege of serving in ecclesiastical positions on this campus for approximately 15 years. Those experiences have had a profound impact on me as I have become more aware of the challenges faced by many of the students at BYU. It is has been my experience that the majority of these challenges fall into at least three different areas.

The first of these has to do with our relationships. By this I mean our sense of connect-

edness with deity, with spouses, with friends, and with roommates. For some, being at a large university can be a very lonely experience.

The second area of challenge, I believe, is one of maintaining balance. How do we meet all of the demands that are placed upon us by school, family, church, and work? I have said on other occasions that the good news is that you will eventually graduate, but the bad news is that the challenge of maintaining appropriate balance will continue and perhaps intensify as you move into your careers and family life.

The third area of concern for most students is that this is the time in your life when you will be making the most important decisions of your entire life—decisions concerning marriage, careers, family, and where you live. These decisions are stress producing and require divine guidance.

I wish we had time to visit about each of these areas in depth. My overarching theme this morning though is that answers and direction to each of these general dilemmas can be

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found in sacred places and in sacred records. This morning I would like to discuss counsel given by Nephi in the Book of Mormon that I believe has application to all three areas of challenge. I will briefly discuss the counsel found in 2 Nephi 31 and 32 and conclude with some specific suggestions based upon the doctrine of Christ that will help us to find increased joy and a sense of spiritual connectedness that will provide direction in meeting the concerns and challenges of our life.

As Nephi was about to pass from this mortal sphere, he concluded his life and his teachings with a few words concerning what he called “the doctrine of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:2). Notice the singular use of the word *doctrine*. This is Nephi’s final testimony not only to his generation but to us as well. I don’t know how many of you have had the experience of spending the final hours with or hearing the final expressions of one who was on the verge of death. But if you have, as I have, you know that they speak of those things that are most important to them as they distill from their life’s experiences their most important learnings. That was Nephi’s situation as he taught us these profoundly important principles.

The first principle included in the doctrine of Christ is to follow the Son. In 2 Nephi 31:10 we read:

And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father?

Quoting Christ Himself, Nephi appeals to all who would be disciples of Christ to follow Him in obedience to the first principles and ordinances of the gospel. To have faith in Christ ultimately means believing Him, trusting Him, obeying Him, and following Him. It is my heartfelt witness to you that as you live obediently and work proactively, doors of professional and family opportunity will be

opened for you. Without going into specifics, I witness to you that I have observed for more than 40 years with students, missionaries, and my own family that obedience to the principles being taught here will open doors of opportunity. Christ knows you and understands your personal challenges today. You will not be left alone. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). Have faith in that promise.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said the following:

To be valiant in the testimony of Jesus is to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him”; it is to deny ourselves “of all ungodliness,” and “love God” with all our “might, mind and strength.” (Moro. 10:32.) . . .

*. . . [It] is to take the Lord’s side on every issue. It is to vote as he would vote. It is to think what he thinks, to believe what he believes, to say what he would say and do what he would do in the same situation. It is to have the mind of Christ and be one with him as he is one with his Father. [“Be Valiant in the Fight of Faith,” *Ensign*, November 1974, 35]*

I would add my own testimony that as I attempt to follow Christ and draw closer to Him, I am a better husband, a better father, a better teacher, and a more accomplished professional. I have said on a number of occasions that I love my wife, Janet, and our children, but I love them more when I love Christ first.

The second step in the doctrine of Christ is to “follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent (2 Nephi 31:13). Nephi’s plea to have faith in and follow Christ would be compelling if it ended there, but it didn’t. Perhaps he had seen the various demands of our lives and the need for clear priorities as he added that we need to have “full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God,” and we need to do so with “real intent.” These are not passive or

casual descriptors. We are required to be clear about our priorities, and we need to consistently follow them in our sacred as well as our secular life.

I am deeply concerned about what I observe to be a casualness among some of us in living the commandments and serving God with full purpose. How can we follow Christ with full purpose of heart and witness to the world that we are His disciples if we participate in the forms of moral decay that we see in our society, including movies, music, and pornography in all of its forms? The counsel of the Lord and His prophets is clear, and has been for generations: “Let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly” (D&C 121:45).

I have a stake president who talks passionately about being a full home teacher as well as a full-tithe payer. Are we full or partial home teachers and visiting teachers? Are we full or partial temple attenders? Are we full liverers of the law of chastity as we keep our minds and thoughts as well as our bodies clean, or do we participate in inappropriate movies, music, or other forms of entertainment that would pollute our thoughts? I will talk more about priorities and the importance of having them made very clear as I conclude these comments.

The third element of the doctrine of Christ is found in the continuation of verse 13 of 2 Nephi 31: “Follow the Son, . . . repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism.” Notice the word *repenting*—suggesting it is a continuous process. In these chapters of 2 Nephi, repentance is mentioned four times. Added importance to this instruction is given by the fact that Nephi quotes the Father. The voice of the Father has, for the most part, been limited to the introduction of and praise of His Son. I should like to share just one experience that emphasizes some counsel regarding repentance that is applicable to us as we face today’s challenges.

A number of years ago, when I first came to this campus, I was called to be a bishop of a student ward. One day a young man walked into my office—a young man I had never seen or met before. He was obviously distraught. He paced back and forth in front of my desk, finally stopped, then looked at me and asked, “Are you Bishop Daines?”

I said, “Yes, I am.”

He then said, “I want you to excommunicate me.”

I said, “Well, we’d better talk.”

So he closed the door, and for the next two hours I heard the story of the most disturbed, distorted life I had ever heard of before or since. For the first and only time in my life, I felt as I visited with this young man that if I had ever met somebody who was a lost soul, this was one of them. One of his transgressions was that of homosexuality. He was a student at the university, and at the time the recommended procedure was to visit with either Elder Mark E. Petersen or Elder Spencer W. Kimball of the Council of the Twelve. We were assigned to visit with Elder Kimball. What a profoundly instructive experience that was for me.

As we talked with Elder Kimball, he heard the same story I had heard. His response, however, was different. He looked at that young man and asked him three questions.

Calling him by name, he first asked, “Would you like to be forgiven of all of your sins and transgressions?”

The young man said yes.

The second question was, “Would you like all of the blessings the Lord has in store for you?”

The young man said yes, he would.

The third question was, “Would you like to be married in the temple for time and all eternity and have a family and raise them up unto the Lord?”

The young man broke down and said, “I would.”

Then Elder Kimball gave this simple but profound advice. He said, “Then let me tell

you how to do it. You get up in the morning, you fall to your knees, and you ask God for strength to live clean for one day. Then when you go to bed at night, you fall to your knees and express gratitude for the strength to have been clean for that one day. You get up on the second day and you do the same thing. You fall to your knees and you ask for strength. You go to bed at night and you express gratitude. And two days will become a week, and a week will become a month, and a month will become six months, and six months will become a year. However long it takes, you can be forgiven.”

The interesting sequel is that for the next three months Elder Kimball called this young bishop in Provo to ask how his friend was doing. He cared enough that he made those phone calls.

It is my testimony to you that God delights in forgiving us. We are told that He descended below all things. I believe that to mean that He has felt all of the concerns and burdens you and I have felt and more. There is not one of us here who can fall further than Christ can reach.

The next two steps in the doctrine of Christ are baptism by water and baptism by the Holy Ghost. Let us continue in verse 13:

Witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel. [2 Nephi 31:13]

We are told in verse 5 of 2 Nephi 31 that Christ was baptized “to fulfil all righteousness.” Because He lived without sin, there must then be a difference between “sinlessness” and “righteousness.” I believe that our righteousness is the active seeking of the mind and will of the Lord in responding to all our challenges and decisions as well as our willing submission to all priesthood ordinances. Nephi spoke of

the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost in verses 13, 14, and 17. As we read these verses along with other parts of the Book of Mormon—namely, in Mosiah and in Alma 5—it is clear that coincident with baptism of the spirit, there is forgiveness of sin, a peace of conscience, joy, spiritual witness, enlightenment, and a change of heart so that we desire only to do right and have a willingness to covenant and obey God and all His commandments. These elements seem to be common for those who have had the baptism of fire. Because we are taught that being born again is a process, I find the following from Elder McConkie to be instructive:

*With most people, conversion is a process; and it goes step by step, degree by degree, level by level, from a lower state to a higher, from grace to grace, until the time that the individual is wholly turned to the cause of righteousness. Now this means that an individual overcomes one sin today and another sin tomorrow. He perfects his life in one field now, and in another field later on. And the conversion process goes on, until it is completed, until we become, literally, as the Book of Mormon says, saints of God instead of natural men. [Bruce R. McConkie, *Be Ye Converted*, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (11 February 1968), 12]*

As we consider the issue of career and our life’s profession, one of the tests of whether we have been converted or not is indicated by our motives and the longings of our heart. All too frequently I have dealt with students who seem to hunger and thirst after the things of the world while dutifully performing things of God. I have heard students say, for instance, “I desire to make a lot of money so that I can pay a large tithing.” Or, they say, by making a lot of money they can better serve the Lord. That rationale sounds a little to me like doing the right thing for the wrong reasons. Rather, I suggest that the longing of the heart of one who has been born again is to hunger and thirst

after things of the Spirit while dutifully performing necessary worldly things.

The next step in the doctrine of Christ is to endure to the end:

And I heard a voice from the Father, saying: Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.

And now, my beloved brethren, I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved. [2 Nephi 31:15–16]

The doctrine of faithful endurance is infinitely serious. It is included here as a basic principle of the gospel by the God and Father of us all. Enduring to the end is an integral part of the doctrine of Christ, and without it the scriptures are clear that it would have been better not to have known Him (see Alma 24:30). Although I believe that enduring to the end has reference to the end of the path of eternal life, I believe there is another dimension of enduring. It has to do with enduring our trials and present challenges with faith and courage.

The Prophet Joseph was a great exemplar, not only of this principle but also of having total faith and confidence in the promises of the Lord. I should like to share with you an entry from the diary of my great-great grandmother. This is a record of a little-known experience of the Prophet Joseph—little known because this diary was lost for 30 to 40 years in my mother's home in New Jersey. It was only rediscovered as they were preparing to move back to Utah in the late 1970s. This is a diary entry of Sister Sarah Stoddard. Her son Charles, my great-grandfather, as a boy of 14, was asked by the Prophet Joseph to serve as a houseboy for William Law, an enemy of the Prophet, and to inform him of any of the Laws' devious plans. It was, I guess, an early form of counterintelligence.

Note the date of the diary entry: April 1844. It was just two months before the Martyrdom of the Prophet.

Dear Diary,

Charles had another faith-promoting experience last night.

Early this morning, even while the darkness still hemmed out the light of the day, Mr. Law, after he had been drinking and planning with his associates through the night, got Charles out of bed to clean and oil his gun. He said he was going to shoot the Prophet, only William Law called him "old Joe Smith." Poor Charles was frightened beyond description, but Mr. Law stood over him and prodded him with his foot when Charles hesitated through fright and anxiety. Finally, when Mr. Law was satisfied with the way the gun was working, he put one bullet in. (He boasted he could kill the Prophet with one shot.) He sent Charles to bring the Prophet.

He ran as fast as he could and delivered the message, but he begged the Prophet not to go to Mr. Law's as Mr. Law was drunk and Charles was afraid he would carry through on his threat to shoot the Prophet in cold blood.

As they walked the few blocks from the Mansion House to the Law residence, the Prophet assured Charles that no harm would come to him that day. Charles was frightened, and he said that it kept racing through his mind, "I am the one that cleaned the gun that is going to be used to kill the Prophet," until he was sick with fear. The Prophet in a final attempt to calm my dear son uttered the fateful words, "Mr. Law may someday kill me, Charles, but it won't be today."

As they approached their destination, Mr. Law came staggering out of the house shouting out what he intended to do.

The Prophet said kindly and unafraid, "You sent for me, Mr. Law?" to which Mr. Law replied with oaths that now he was doing the whole world a favor by disposing of the Prophet with one shot.

Calmly the Prophet unbuttoned his shirt and bared his chest, then said, "I'm ready now, Mr. Law." Charles said at this point he nearly fainted.

Sick fear strangled him until he was speechless and paralyzed, unable to move a muscle.

Mr. Law paced a few steps, turned, aimed, and pressed the trigger. There was complete silence. Then the air rang with profanity, and Mr. Law turned on Charles, accusing him of fixing the gun so it would not go off and threatening to kill even Charles—my innocent, frightened, but faithful son.

The Prophet, to divert Mr. Law's blame of Charles, suggested that a can be placed on a fence post for Mr. Law to take a practice shot. Relieved, Charles ran for a can and laid it on its side on the post. Mr. Law paced back, took aim, and fired. His "one shot" streaked through the exact center of the can.

Even Mr. Law was quiet, as if stunned.

The Prophet buttoned up his shirt, gave Charles a meaningful look, and then said, "If you are finished with me now, Mr. Law, I have other things needing to be done. Good morning. [Diary of Sarah Stoddard; text modernized]

I shall ever be grateful for the remarkable example of the Prophet Joseph Smith. He endured faithfully not only to the end of his life but to the end of each one of his many trials. He also demonstrated in this situation total faith and confidence in the promises that the Lord had made to him as well as to righteous men and women everywhere that they would not be taken before their work was completed.

I am saying to you today, have confidence in the promises the Lord has made to you.

Finally, the doctrine of Christ tells us in verse 20 of chapter 31:

Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

In chapter 32, in verse 3, we read:

Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, they speak the words of Christ. Wherefore, I said unto you, feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do.

There, my brothers and sisters, is one of the important answers and applications of the doctrine of Christ to our current challenges. But to feast on the words of Christ is different than to snack on or even to read them. The scriptures will lead to personal revelation that will tell us all things that we must do to solve the problems and challenges that we face as university students, but only if we truly feast and study and meditate upon them. The Lord will affirm our decisions regarding family, career, and important relationships.

I have always found the following statement from President Spencer W. Kimball to be encouraging and instructive:

I find that when I get casual in my relationships with divinity and when it seems that no divine ear is listening and no divine voice is speaking, that I am far, far away. If I immerse myself in the scriptures the distance narrows and the spirituality returns. [TSWK, 135]

In the few moments that remain, I should like to suggest the following program patterned after the doctrine of Christ to help us meet the challenges of relationships, maintain balance in our lives, and make major decisions. I suggest to you—indeed, promise you—that if you will follow this program for even one week, you will find major comfort and direction. Please note that these suggestions are derived from the principles as well as the order of these principles as taught by Nephi.

For this program, I would encourage you first in an attempt to become one with Christ in full purpose of heart to clearly establish your priorities, put them in writing, and review them regularly. Have them guide the decisions

that you make as if they were your personal constitution. This should not be a casual effort but one that you think about carefully.

A number of years ago, I listed mine, which I will share with you now. Notice the sequence.

1. Gather spiritual manna daily to establish a relationship with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.
2. Relate to and nurture my family.
3. Magnify my Church callings by serving others.
4. Meet the demands of my profession.
5. Develop hobbies and other personal interests.

The order is important: Take care of my spiritual relationship, take care of my family, fulfill my Church obligations, then my professional obligations, and then have personal hobbies and experiences.

The second exercise of this weekly program would be to repent of your sins—one day at a time. I would like to ask you the question “What one thing could you do now to bring you closer to Christ?” I invite you to stop and listen carefully to your conscience. What one thing could you do now? I would like to suggest that every morning you fall to your knees and ask the Lord for help and strength and support in accomplishing that one thing. As you go to bed at night, express gratitude for the ability for that one day to make progress. One day will become two, and two days will become four, and a week will pass by, and if you will continue that practice, it will be possible for you to become “perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32).

The third exercise relates to water baptism. The Lord has commanded us to renew our covenants and commitments every Sunday by partaking of the sacrament. At the sacrament table we renew not only our baptismal covenants but all of our covenants, including those of the temple. The sacrament hour can become a time to totally recommit. When we eat an ordinary meal, we ask God to bless it to

the use of our bodies. When we partake of the sacrament, we ask God to bless it to the use of our souls. We eat and drink in remembrance of Jesus Christ. May I suggest for this week, as a spiritual exercise, that we intensify our focus and concentration at this most sacred moment of the week as we partake of the sacrament and concentrate on the changes that we can make to improve our sense of connectedness with the Savior and thus with others.

The next exercise has to do with baptism of the spirit. One of the important ways to feel the Spirit of the Lord is to give service. Thus I commend to you in this exercise program that you commit a daily act of selfless service. You may want to try a fast in conjunction with this service—not necessarily a fast from food. What if you were to fast from negative or critical or worldly talk? Or maybe you could fast from a habit that you are trying to change. As you engage in service and in the fasting from the behavior that takes you away from the Spirit, you will feel a renewal of the Spirit of the Lord.

The last exercise would be to feast upon the Word. Would you try for 30 minutes each day to feast from the scriptures? Do not set a target for reading a chapter a day or a specific number of verses a day, but, instead, set your targets in terms of time. Feast, meditate, reflect, apply.

Our time is gone, and I should like to conclude by bearing my testimony that life will continue to place before us trials and tests and important decisions. I bear testimony that answers and support will come to us from sacred places and sacred records as we actively seek them.

I want to affirm my love and concern for you. You are the children of promise. The Lord has made specific promises to those of you of this generation. Have faith in those promises.

These principles we have talked about today are central to our salvation. It is not sufficient to just understand them. It is necessary to practice them. Let us establish clearly our

priorities in life. Let us go to the sacrament table repenting of our sins and renewing our covenants on a weekly basis. Let us serve others. Let us fast from critical talk and worldly behavior. Let us feast upon the Word.

I bear testimony that the Book of Mormon is the word of God. It is another testament that

Jesus is the Christ. This is as important to us today as it was to the people in the days the prophets wrote. I bear this testimony, and express again my appreciation for the wonderful privilege that has been mine to be at this special place, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.