

Your Articles of Faith

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I want to confirm the honesty and the quality of the students at Brigham Young University. The story is told around the Church Office Building that a student from Brigham Young University came up for a mission interview. The general authority asked him a number of very searching questions. Finally he looked at him very intently and said, “Young man, do you smoke?”

The young man answered, “No, thank you.”

I respond to this invitation to speak just as it was given. “Will you come down and talk to the students and the faculty at Brigham Young University?” That is what I am here to do. I am not going to give an address or an oration. I am not capable of either, nor of a research paper. I just want to talk to you. I wish somehow that we could create the illusion of an individual conversation because I want to be intimate and personal on a matter or two. So if you could, in your minds, disregard the persons sitting on either side of you and in front of and around you, I will talk specifically and pointedly to *you*.

Here you are, students at Brigham Young University, attending classes in the various disciplines. You are in some classes because you want to be there. Others you were guided to by wise counselors. And some few you attend forced by unyielding graduation requirements. You spend your time reading, studying, experimenting,

editing, searching, listening, and sometimes hearing (you note that I separate the two), and there is little time for all that you want to do. Then there may be a little postponing and avoiding and ignoring—and maybe just a little dozing. In recognition of that possibility, some would-be philosopher or poet, I am not sure which, wrote “The Poor Student’s Soliloquy,” and I quote:

*I don’t like the teacher;
The subject is too deep.
I’d quit this class
But I need the sleep.*

I wonder what you would do, as students, if you had all the time you wanted—if you had all the time and the means just to study. I quote from Dr. Edwin A. Lee, former dean of the School of Education at UCLA, speaking at the inauguration of Howard S. McDonald as president of Brigham Young University:

While I was an undergraduate at Columbia University, there was a man in attendance already known as the perennial student. He had been left a

Boyd K. Packer, assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, delivered this devotional address on March 21, 1962.

modest but adequate bequest with a stipulation that it should continue as long as he was engaged in collegiate study: thereafter, the income was to be given to charity.

When I returned for graduate work twelve years later, he was still there, and he remained a student until he died just a few years ago. It was said that he had been granted every degree offered by Columbia and had taken practically every course. He was a man who was the epitome of erudition. No field of knowledge was foreign to him. He was probably more widely read than the best of his professors. He was a cultured gentleman. But, he was not a truly intelligent man. Certainly such intelligence as he possessed was not that which is the glory of God. Inherently he was selfish. He never married. He was without ambition or influence. He was a joke to the students and a freak to the faculty. He knew a prodigious lot, but his real index of intelligence was low, no matter what his I.Q.¹

This estimate of the man by Dr. Lee, I think, is essentially correct. He had a single interest, a single concern, with his opportunity for education, and that was pointedly and primarily with himself. I would suppose that if each of us had an eternity to study at Brigham Young University, or any other university, and we pointed our efforts at ourselves only, as this man did, then we would fall far short of the opportunity we have in educating ourselves. There is much more to gain, particularly here at Brigham Young University—likely more so here than at any other university anywhere in existence on the earth.

Discovering Who You Are

As the main point of what I would like to talk to you about, I quote from the founder of Brigham Young University—president of the Church, prophet, educated man—Brigham Young, who said:

The greatest lesson you can learn is to learn yourselves. When we learn ourselves, we learn our neighbours. When we know precisely how to deal with ourselves, we know how to deal with our neighbours. You have come here to learn this. You cannot learn it immediately, neither can all of the philosophy of the age teach it to you: you have to come here to get a practical experience and to learn yourselves. You will then begin to learn more perfectly the things of God. No being can

thoroughly learn himself, without understanding more or less of the things of God: neither can any being learn and understand the things of God, without learning himself: he must learn himself, or he never can learn God.²

Your challenge here, then, as I would appraise it, is to know yourselves. Once you start getting acquainted with yourselves, finding out who you are and where you belong and who your relatives are (spiritually speaking as well as in the earthly frame of reference), you come to the astounding, overwhelming realization that you *are* a child of God—that you belong to Him, that He is your Father. He is our Father.

I think that it is not easy to discover this in a college frame of reference. Colleges in general, and maybe BYU to a degree, are structured almost as to prevent one's really knowing himself. It is a rare student, a rare and a gifted student, who, in the course of his college education, becomes acquainted with himself.

I recall being in a graduate class here a year or two ago taught by a visiting professor (I am grateful it was a visiting professor or I could not tell this story)—a capable, qualified, and inspiring teacher. Although the course title was something else, he was preoccupied with individual differences and spent the major share of the time emphasizing the significance of them to teachers.

We were assigned a term paper. That is usual, isn't it? I thought that since this teacher recognized individual differences, here was my opportunity to write the kind of term paper that would help me best. I could write the paper that would help me discover what I know or what I need to know about this subject. Since we had to have an interview with the professor before we went ahead on our project, I made the proposal that I would like to survey the literature of the field and then write, in my own words, without reference to any other authors, without including any quotations, this subject according to *me*. Then I indicated to the professor that I did not care how carefully he edited it or how severe he was in his judgment. His appraisal would be the more helpful. Then I expressed myself as being willing to read references and cite any number of references in the bibliography, but *not* to list quotations.

(I say here, parenthetically, that I resent the necessity most often imposed upon students of racing to the library and looking through books, trying to find a place where somebody said something approximately in the direction you would speak, extracting the quotations, tying them together with a few meaningless connecting sentences, and then handing it in as a term paper. Hence my proposal to the professor.)

I remember he considered the proposal very carefully, and then he said, "You mean, *no* quotations?"

"Exactly."

"You mean, spin it out of whole cloth?"

"I do."

Then he pondered rather deliberately and said, "Oh, no. I don't think we could let you do that."

Before I left the office, I had been assigned one book and several articles from which I could quote.

Well, I am not critical of the use of expert opinion, but I think it is often misused. I think that in the course of always searching for someone else, in the course of always looking for what others have done and what others have thought and what others have felt, often we overlook what is in our hearts and never make the most important of all discoveries.

Speaking of expert opinion, I was in another graduate class where a student was reporting on the prominent pioneer educator Horace Mann. Another student in the class challenged some of the information he was presenting. He stopped and said, "I want to tell you that these are not my own words. I am quoting directly from the author—these words came straight from Horace's mouth."

In your search for yourself I would like to make a suggestion or two, which is the burden of what I want to talk to you about this morning.

Let me recommend that you as a Latter-day Saint student have a chat with yourself. Now if you are going to do this, you might do it privately so as not to excite some suppositions about yourself. When you do, realize that this talk is for your own benefit—nobody else included, not anyone. Then there can be no misrepresenting, no counterfeiting, no avoiding, no covering up, no inventing. Just look at yourself.

Once you have, I pose two questions for you to answer. I suggest that these be answered to yourself alone. It is recognized, isn't it, that the whole purpose of this university is to promote and disseminate the gospel of Jesus Christ? That is what we are here for. That is why there is a Brigham Young University—to disseminate the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you are about to graduate and have not answered these questions to yourself, let me suggest that you do.

The Gospel According to You

First, just what is the gospel according to *you* like? How does it compare with the gospel as revealed to us in the scriptures? Is it a full gospel, or have you left out some essentials? Are you satisfied that the plan of the gospel according to you will effect your salvation?

I know what the gospel according to President David O. McKay is like, for I have heard and read his sermons and have sensed his spirit. I know what the gospel according to Joseph Fielding Smith is like and others of the Brethren, for I have heard them declare it. I know what the gospel according to Brigham Young is like essentially, for I have read much about him. And I find that they are full and whole and coordinate with the revealed word. But the most amazing discovery—one that was most helpful and one that was a humbling experience—was to determine one day what the gospel was like according to *me*. I found that I had left some things out; I found that I was guilty of the game of pick and choose. Some things that I needed most but liked the least I had deleted. I didn't make this discovery until I asked myself the question, "What is the gospel like according to you?" I suggest that you do the same.

Establishing Your Foundations of Faith

The second question I pose, after you have answered the first question and know a little about what you feel about it, is this: would you decide for you alone, "What are your articles of faith?"

If my memory serves me correctly, it was in *Measure for Measure* that Shakespeare said, "Go to your bosom, knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know."³

Somewhere along the long journey that you face in your college career, there ought to be a time when you commune with yourself—that you find out, besides what all the experts are thinking and what all is in the library, a little about *you* and your gospel. Somewhere we may learn that the gospel can and should be *our* gospel.

Let me urge you to be mature and honest in your judgment of yourself. You might, of necessity, be making comparisons. Our little brown-eyed boy came home one day from kindergarten a year or two ago, and he was chuckling, all amused. I asked him what was so amusing.

He said, “Nuffin’.”

I said, “What is so funny?”

“Nuffin’.”

And then he chuckled the more, so I pressed him a little bit and said, “Well, what is so funny?”

He said, “Oh, deys a tid over in tindadarten what tain’t tok plain.”

I suggest that our grown-up judgments of one another, and maybe our judgments of ourselves, are about that mature.

If it is so that you are not outlining your articles of faith and that you are not discovering your relationship with Christ in the process of your education here at Brigham Young University, one of two things is apparent. Either you are not learning to the fulness of your opportunity or the members of the faculty are not teaching to the fulness of this obligation. If I were a student, which I am, I would more quickly suppose the first. My testimony to you would be that the gift is here for us if we will but seek, but it cannot be imposed upon us, however fervent the faculty members can be and are and however determined they are to help make the gospel according to you coordinate with the gospel according to the Lord Jesus Christ. It cannot be done unless somehow we look at ourselves.

Now several words of counsel and advice: When you look at yourself, why don’t you make a list of your strengths and weaknesses, and do not try to hide them. You know them. You cannot hide them. You can look right through yourself. The Lord knows them and looks at you. I have learned from personal experience that His servants can do the same—look into you and *see you*.

After you have appraised your weaknesses, start acting like a Latter-day Saint. And if you have weaknesses, avoid the circumstances that bring out your weaknesses. Stay away from them. When you look at yourself, if you find something unpleasant there—I have a time or two, and I guess all of you have or will—then get rid of it.

If it is of severe intensity and ugly too, and you do not quite know what to do, go see your bishop. He is a judge in Israel—an agent of the Lord. He has the formula. And there is no use your carrying this about. I interview many young men going into missions and see them weep with relief after they have had a burden lifted from them that they have carried needlessly for so long. Why don’t you talk with yourself, and if there *is* something there, be *done* with it?

I notice this, that there is a heavy incidence of “I” trouble among our youth. It does not show up on the physical examinations because it is spelled the other way. It is not *e-y-e*. It is *I*. When we look at ourselves and find our relationship to God, we change perspective a bit, and the individual himself loses some of his importance in his own eyes. Once you have drawn a circle around you, look yourself over, and then maybe if you would step out of that circle and put Christ in, it would have a significant effect in the way you live.

I have another question to ask you. What difference does the Lord Jesus Christ make to you? Any at all? I know He makes a difference in the sociology here at the university and with the companions you keep. These have an effect. But do you have any personal relationship with Him? Do your articles of faith include Him? I recall reading in the Book of Mormon a scripture that was as important to me as any ever has been. It read:

*But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.*⁴

As I read that, I thought how valuable a gift it would be if I could have charity—if Christ could love *me* and if I could win the love of Christ. Then the day of discovery came and I found that I was reading it backwards; charity was something

I was *to give*, not to get. It was something that I was indebted to give, something that I owed, not something that someone was indebted to give to me. Suddenly my relationship with my Father in Heaven took on an entirely new and more important perspective.

Your Articles of Faith

Now here are four points for you to remember. Does the gospel according to *you* include these? Are these your articles of faith?

1. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

I recognize two kinds of faith. The first is the kind that is apparent in the world. It is the common denominator of most everything that goes on. It is the thing that lets us exist. It is the thing that gives us some hope of getting anything done. Everyone has it, some in a larger measure than others. The second kind of faith, remarkably rare, unusual to find, is the kind of faith that causes things to happen. Faith is a power as real as electricity except a thousand times more powerful. Now did you ever exercise faith—exercise it, practice it, you see, not just take it for granted? When you look at yourself, ask yourself how faithful you are. Faith is a first principle of the gospel according to the Lord. Is it a first principle in the gospel according to you?

2. Repentance

This should be obvious. Repentance means to turn from paths that are not correct and to do whatever is necessary to make the adjustments and get back on the path that is correct. I ask you students and faculty, are you so enamored with one of the disciplines, the one that interests you so much here, that you are willing to judge the gospel principles against it?

Is it true that whenever a principle of the gospel happens to coordinate with a principle or theory of your favorite discipline, that you will accept it, but that otherwise you will reject it? Are your articles of faith based particularly on some field of intellectual learning, or are they articles of *faith*? Is the gospel according to you a shoddy, makeshift conglomeration? If it is, let me suggest

that some of the greatest minds in human history have attempted to produce a gospel of their own. In some cases they have organized a church to implement it. I suggest that it may be just a little difficult for anyone of us as individuals to formulate a gospel according to us that is superior to the gospel according to Christ. As you discover, as you look at yourself, that you have been unconsciously making this attempt, you may do well to include in your articles of faith the principle of repentance.

3. Baptism

Does the gospel according to you include renewing your covenants? We have all had baptism, and that makes us agents of Christ. We have taken upon ourselves His name. We should develop a relationship with Him. We should have constant communication with Him.

4. The Laying on of Hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost

Is this included in your articles of faith? If so, do you live by it?

We were in a meeting the other day. There was a very important matter being discussed, and it was discussed at great length. Finally a course of action was decided upon. As the meeting concluded, they called on Elder Harold B. Lee to offer the closing prayer. He stood, and it was an inspiring thing to be present and hear him pray. He said words to this effect: "We thank thee, Father, that the light which is due this, thy chosen servant [referring to the member of the First Presidency who had led the deliberations and had proposed the course of action], has been apparent here today and that we are witnesses of thy love and thy revelation to thy servants."

Coming to Know the Savior

Now, if you are not taking advantage of the full blessing of Church membership when you look yourself over carefully and formulate your articles of faith, it may be time to start. When you look at you and you want to center everything in you and to use the word *I*, use just a little caution. Be humble and prayerful, lest the gospel according to you and your articles of faith differ materially

from those of the Lord. Sometimes the term “I” can mislead us. Remember William Ernest Henley’s poem “Invictus”:

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole.*

It ends with these four lines:

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.*⁵

A number of years ago, Elder Orson F. Whitney of the Council of the Twelve, seeing this poem held up as a great example of courage, sensed maybe a thread of egotism in it, and he penned an answer, entitling it “The Soul’s Captain.” Elder Whitney said in answer to the declaration “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul”:

*Art thou in truth? Then what of him
Who bought thee with his blood?
Who plunged into devouring seas
And snatched thee from the flood?*

*Who bore for all our fallen race
What none but him could bear.—
The God who died that man might live,
And endless glory share?*

*Of what avail thy vaunted strength,
Apart from his vast might?
Pray that his Light may pierce the gloom,
That thou mayest see aright.*

*Men are as bubbles on the wave,
As leaves upon the tree.
Thou, captain of thy soul, forsooth!
Who gave that place to thee?*

*Free will is thine—free agency,
To wield for right or wrong;
But thou must answer unto him
To whom all souls belong.*

*Bend to the dust that head “unbowed,”
Small part of Life’s great whole!
And see in him, and him alone,
The Captain of thy soul.*⁶

I submit to you students that if you follow the injunction of President Brigham Young and learn of yourself and if you are honest with yourselves and evidence enough faith to accept the gospel according to revealed word where the gospel according to you may be lacking, that somewhere at the end of that road you will find a companionship—an intimate, priceless, eternal companionship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

As you know, I belonged here at the university and still do (I hope), and about six months ago—maybe prematurely, certainly without notice—I was catapulted into association with the general authorities of the Church. There comes with that a great conviction, and I could say nothing more important to you, as you seek for yourselves, than to bear witness to you that God lives. This I know. I bear witness of Christ, that He lives, an actual being; that this is His Church; that the destiny of it is in His hands; and that as we discover ourselves, we discover our relationship with Him. May our companionship with Him be perfect, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Edwin A. Lee, “The Glory of God Is Intelligence,” in Inauguration Services of Howard S. McDonald as President of Brigham Young University, 14 November 1945, 34.
2. *JD* 8:334.
3. Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, act 2, scene 2, lines 136–37.
4. Moroni 7:47.
5. William Ernest Henley, *Echoes* (1888), no. 4, “In Memoriam R. T. Hamilton Bruce” (“Invictus”); emphasis added.
6. Orson F. Whitney, “The Soul’s Captain,” *Improvement Era*, May 1926, opposite inside front cover (611).