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Richard O. Cowan

Near the end of his visit with his “other sheep” in ancient America, the Lord specified that his church must meet at least two requirements: (1) it should be called after his name, and (2) it should be built on the foundation of his gospel. The Savior instructed: “And how be it my church save it be called in my name? For if a church be called in Moses’ name then it be Moses’ church; or if it be called in the name of a man then it be the church of a man; but if it be called in my name then it is my church, if it so be that they are built upon my gospel” (3 Nephi 27:8). The Restored Church has met both of these requirements.

The Church’s Name

As individuals join the Church through baptism, they covenant to take upon themselves the name of Jesus Christ (D&C 20:37) and regularly renew this covenant as they partake of the sacrament (20:77). It is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that the Church they join should bear that same name. This was the case with the New Testament Church, whose members became known as “Christians” (see Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). The Apostle Paul chastised some of the Corinthian Saints who professed, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas [Peter]; and I of Christ.” He lamented that there should be such

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divisions or “contentions” among members of the Church: “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor 1:10–13; compare 3 Nephi 27:3). Peter had earlier made the same point when he testified that he had healed a lame man in “the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” and then affirmed that “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:10–12).

The Book of Mormon similarly records that the faithful took upon themselves the Lord’s name. The first mention of an organized church among the Nephites was nearly a century and a half before the time of Christ’s earthly mission. Alma baptized over two hundred converts, “and they were called the church of God, or the church of Christ, from that time forward” (Mosiah 18:17). Later, when Alma and his people reached the land of Zarahemla, king Mosiah authorized him to “establish churches throughout all the land. . . . notwithstanding there being many churches [local congregations] they were all one church, yea, even the church of God” (25:19–22).

When the kingdom of God was once again organized on earth in 1830, it was known as “the Church of Christ” (D&C 20:1). The early members commonly referred to it by this name or sometimes as “The Church of Jesus Christ.” By 1834 however, the *Evening and Morning Star* observed, “As the members of this church profess a belief in the truth of the book of Mormon, the world, either out of contempt and ridicule, or to distinguish us from others, have been very lavish in bestowing the title of ‘Mormonite.’” The *Star*’s editor was convinced that this “stigma” was the result of a “bitterness of feeling” and emphatically insisted, “**WE** do not accept the above title [Mormonite], nor shall we wear it as **OUR** name, though it may be lavished upon **US** double to what it has heretofore been” (“*The Saints*,” [May 1840] 2:158; also in *History of the Church* 2:62–63; hereafter *HC*).

Church members did not want to be guilty of being called by “the name of a man.” Consequently, on 3 May 1834, the First Presidency and other Church leaders convened to seek inspira-

tion in selecting a label or designation that could replace “Mormonite.” “After prayer, the conference proceeded to discuss the subject of names and appellations, when a motion was made by Sidney Rigdon, and seconded by Newel K. Whitney, that this Church be known hereafter by the name of ‘The Church of the Latter-day Saints’” (*HC* 2:62–63). This name was consistent with the New Testament practice of referring to the early Christians as “saints” (see for example Rom 1:1–7; 1 Cor 1:1–2; Eph 1:1). This title suggests one who is holy—the word *saint* coming from the same root as *sanctified*. Nevertheless, one may be called a saint without being perfect; Paul explained that the central purpose of the Church is “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12).

While compiling the history of the 1834 conference, Elder B. H. Roberts noted that the record of this council was headed “Minutes of a Conference of the Elders of the Church of Christ.” “It will be observed from the heading that the Elders assembled in the conference are called *the Elders of the Church of Christ*. This is pointed out in order that it may be seen that while the conference adopted the title ‘The Church of the Latter-day Saints,’ and the Church was for some years called by that name, it was not the intention to regard the Church as any other than the Church of Christ” (*HC* 2:62f). It seems clear that these early Saints were not trying to abandon the name “Church of Jesus Christ,” but rather were inspired to adopt a readily understandable means of referring to themselves other than by the unwanted label of “Mormonites.”

A revelation given in 1838 clarified what the Church’s true and complete name was to be: “For thus shall my church be called in the last days, even The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (D&C 115:4). Thus the inspired description “Latter-day Saints” was added as a suffix to the essential designation “Church of Jesus Christ.” The capitalized *The* affirms the Church’s unique standing among all other organizations (compare 1:30). “The name thus conferred,” explained

Elder James E. Talmage, “is a self-explanatory and exclusive title of distinction and authority. It is an epitome of the cardinal truths and of the philosophical basis of the system commonly called ‘Mormonism’” (40–41). Elder B. H. Roberts added:

The appropriateness of this title is self-evident, and in it there is a beautiful recognition of the relationship both of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Saints to the organization. It is ‘The Church of Jesus Christ.’ It is the Lord’s; He owns it, He organized it. . . . [B]ut it is an institution which also belongs to the Saints. . . . They have a conjoint ownership in it with Jesus Christ, which ownership is beautifully recognized in the latter part of the title. (*HC* 3:24f)

Still, the practice of calling the Church by a name other than the Savior’s has persisted. From time to time, the Saints have been cautioned not to overuse such phrases as “the Mormon Church” or “the LDS Church” because those names obscure our faith that Christ is truly the head of his Church (see Nelson). “I suppose that regardless of our efforts, we may never convert the world to general use of the full and correct name of the Church,” conceded President Gordon B. Hinkley. He continued, “Because of the shortness of the word *Mormon* and the ease with which it is spoken and written, they will continue to call us the *Mormons*, the *Mormon Church*, and so forth.” President Hinkley recalled the Prophet Joseph Smith’s comment that the name “*Mormon* means *more good*,” and therefore suggested we should not be ashamed of this nickname (52; see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 299–300; hereafter *TPJS*).

“This is My Gospel”

The Savior’s second requirement for a church to be his church was that it must be “built upon [his] gospel” (3 Nephi 27:8). The roots of the word *gospel* shed light on its meaning. This word is derived from the Old English *godspel* which is a combination of *god* (meaning “good”) and *spel* (meaning “story”). *Godspel* was a translation of the Latin *evangelium*,

which in turn was derived from the Greek *euangelion* meaning “well,” or “beautiful news.” It is related to the Greek word *angelos* (meaning “messenger”). Hence, the English words *gospel* and *angel* are closely related in meaning even though in our language they have taken on rather different forms. The gospel of Jesus Christ truly is “good news”—the best we could hope to receive.

Christian theologians have identified what they call the *kerygma* of the gospel, which is not just the heart of its message, but is actually the proclamation of a key event. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* declares: “At the heart of the NT *kerygma* stands the lordship of God. . . . The summons to repentance (M[at]t 3:1 f.; M[at]t 4:17) stands in closest relationship to the preaching of God’s kingdom.” The *Dictionary* explains that “repentance does not bring in the kingdom,” but rather it makes possible our individual participation in it. “As the herald goes before the chariot of the king and announces the approach of the ruler, so the preacher hastens through the world and cries: Make ready, the [kingdom] is already near,” and proclaims Jesus as the Son of God, and as the Christ, the Messiah. Those who repent and come unto him are assured a remission of their sins (Acts 2:37–38). “The reality of the resurrection constitutes the fulness of the early Christian *kerygma*,” the *Dictionary* concludes. Hence, “stories about Jesus, however edifying, are of themselves empty, 1 Cor 15:14. If they are not understood in the light of faith in the risen Lord, they are simply stories of things that happened in the past and are more or less valueless for the present” (Kittel 3:710–711). Paul summed up the *kerygma* when he declared:

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. . . . And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. (1 Cor 2:1, 2, 4)

The Lord himself has provided his own definitions of what the gospel includes. Three of these are found in the Doctrine and Covenants. As the Lord called brethren to go forth as missionaries, he instructed them to proclaim this message:

Repent, repent, and prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand; Yea, repent and be baptized, every one of you, for a remission of your sins; yea, be baptized even by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost. Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and remember that they shall have faith in me or they can in nowise be saved. (D&C 33:10–12)

A briefer definition followed a few months later: “And this is my gospel—repentance and baptism by water, and then cometh the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, even the Comforter, which showeth all things, and teacheth the peaceable things of the kingdom” (D&C 39:6).

The great vision of post-earthly kingdoms emphasized what makes gospel principles efficacious: “And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—that he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness; that through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him” (D&C 76:40–42).

The most complete definition of the gospel is recorded in the Book of Mormon—in the same chapter where the Master specified that his Church must be built upon it. He declared:

Behold, I have given unto you my gospel, and this is the gospel which I have given unto you—that I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me.

And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. . . .

And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom; therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their

garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end.

Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel; and ye know the things that ye must do in my church; for the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do. (3 Nephi 27:13–14, 19–21)

Based on the foregoing, the gospel plan might be summarized under the following ten statements. Notice how the Book of Mormon significantly adds to our understanding of these gospel principles.

1. All will be judged according to their works. “I [will] draw all men unto me, . . . to be judged of their works (3 Nephi 27:14). Amulek taught that this judgment will hold no surprises: “We shall be brought to stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt” (Alma 11:43). Alma explained that more than just our deeds will be involved: “For our words will condemn us, yea, our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us” (12:14). Alma told his wayward son Corianton that even our desires will be taken into account (41:5).

2. No unclean thing can enter God’s presence. “And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom” (3 Nephi 27:19). Nephi learned in a vision, “The kingdom of God is not filthy, and there cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God; wherefore there must needs be a place of filthiness prepared for that which is filthy” (1 Nephi 15:34). In fact, Moroni asserted that the wicked would be “more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of [their] filthiness before him, than [they] would to dwell with the damned souls in hell” (Mormon 9:4).

3. God sent Christ to be crucified for the sins of the world. “My Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the

cross” (3 Nephi 27:14; see also John 3:16). The Savior used the phrase “lifted up” when referring to his atoning sacrifice on the cross. Clearly, the Savior’s atoning sacrifice is at the heart of the gospel. Amulek declared:

For it is expedient that an atonement should be made . . . or else all mankind must unavoidably perish. . . . For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice. (Alma 34:9–10)

Even though we often refer to the Savior’s atonement as a great gift from God the Father, Jesus himself was a willing participant. In a latter-day revelation he explained that he “so loved the world that he gave his own life, that as many as would believe might become the sons of God” (D&C 34:3).

4. Only through Christ’s atoning blood can we become clean. “Therefore nothing entereth into his rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood” (3 Nephi 27:19). Both Nephi and Moroni explained that we must look to the redeemer for salvation, “relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Nephi 31:19) and “relying alone upon the merits of Christ” (Moroni 6:4). Moroni concluded the entire Book of Mormon with the invitation to “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (10:32).

5. In the light of point number four, faith in the Savior is the logical and obvious first principle of the gospel. The righteous will be cleansed “because of their faith” (3 Nephi 27:19).

6. We must repent of all our sins. “Repent, all ye ends of the earth” (3 Nephi 27:20). Because sins are the reason for our being unclean, certainly we must abandon them if we hope to return to God’s presence. Furthermore, overcoming sins is an essential step to developing faith in God. When the sons of Mosiah preached the gospel to the Lamanites, the king expressed a deep desire to know for himself that there was a God:

“I will give away all my sins to know thee” (Alma 22:18). The promise to those who repent is remarkable: “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more. By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:42–43; compare Isa 1:18).

7. Baptism continues the cleansing process. “Come unto me and be baptized in my name” (3 Nephi 27:20). Immersion in water brings remission or forgiveness of sins. The Apostle Paul explained that we may “wash away [our] sins” (Acts 22:16) through baptism and then come forth “in newness of life” (Rom 6:3–6). Nephi explained that even Christ needed to be baptized to “fulfil all righteousness”—setting the example of obedience to his Father. “And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfill all righteousness,” Nephi concluded, “O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized” (2 Nephi 31:5).

8. We are sanctified through receiving the Holy Ghost. We are to be “sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that [we] may stand spotless before [him] at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:20). Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught:

By the power of the Holy Ghost—who is the Sanctifier, dress, iniquity, carnality, sensuality, and every evil thing is burned out of the repentant soul as if by fire. . . . The baptism of fire is not something in addition to the receipt of the Holy Ghost; rather, it is the actual enjoyment of the gift which is offered by the laying on of hands at the time of baptism. (73)

The Lord explained that this “sanctification” is the means by which we “may stand spotless before [him] at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:20). Furthermore, “the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in [Christ’s] name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance” (John 14:26; compare Moroni 10:5).

9. We must remain faithful to the end. Salvation comes only to those who continue in “faithfulness unto the end”

(3 Nephi 27:19). Note how in this verse the Lord employs both “faith” (referring to our trust in him) and “faithfulness” (referring to our resulting good works). Nephi reflected both elements when he declared that “it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23; compare James 2:14–26). Perhaps the greatest exhortation to endure is found near the end of Nephi’s writings. After explaining that repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost constitute the “gate” which places us on the path to eternal life, Nephi inquired:

After ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; . . . 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. (2 Nephi 31:19–20)

10. By following the gospel of Jesus Christ, we will be exalted in the celestial kingdom. “Therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:22). Interestingly, the phrase “lifted up” is used not only in reference to the Savior’s crucifixion, but it also refers to our ultimate exaltation (D&C 5:35).

The Church is “built” upon the gospel as it teaches these principles and administers necessary ordinances to implement them. It teaches us to do good works, to be clean and pure both physically and spiritually, and to live lives worthy of the high standards the Lord has set. Its leaders repeatedly bear witness of the Savior’s atonement and testify that through faith in him can we hope to return to our Father’s presence. They help us to qualify for eventual exaltation by constantly admonishing us to repent of our sins and endure faithful to the end.

Having examined the Lord’s appearing to and teaching his other sheep in ancient America, we can see that they knew that he had literally been resurrected and that they understood the principles of his gospel that they must live. Consequently, we

can more fully appreciate why the true church must bear his name and teach the principles of his gospel.

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