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The Only Sure Foundation: Building on the Rock of Our Redeemer

Author(s): Robert L. Millet

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Robert L. Millet

It is often the case that at a time of spiritual crisis the Lord raises up someone to minister to the needs of a wandering generation. In a day when pride had afflicted the Nephites, when because of their own feelings of self-sufficiency God had left the people “in their own strength” (Hel 4:13), he called and prepared Nephi and Lehi, sons of Helaman. These two chosen servants, surely than which there were no greater in all the Nephite saga, lived and taught in such a way as to be the means of transforming hundreds of people and leading them out of spiritual darkness into the marvelous light of Christ. At a time when it was obvious that the preservation of the society depended wholly upon cleansing the inner vessel, Nephi yielded up his position as chief judge and, like his great-grandfather Alma, confined himself with his brother Lehi to the work of the ministry (see Alma 4:15–20). The success of these two missionaries seemed to be a direct result of the foundation upon which they built, a doctrinal base founded on the teachings of their father Helaman. This chapter will focus upon the salient doctrines contained in the words of Helaman to his sons just prior to his death: a plea and a commission to build our lives and establish our faith on Jesus Christ, the rock of our salvation.

Robert L. Millet is dean of Religious Education and associate professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University.

Power in a Name

The Holy Ghost often speaks to our consciences through the medium of memory. One Book of Mormon prophet leader after another pleads with his flock to remember: remember what the Lord has done; remember the covenants of the Lord with our fathers; remember the trials and tribulations of our forebears and that the Lord delivered them from captivity. In the spirit of that same call to devotion, Helaman said to his sons:

Behold, my sons, I desire that ye should remember to keep the commandments of God; and I would that ye should declare unto the people these words. Behold, I have given unto you the names of our first parents who came out of the land of Jerusalem; and this I have done that when you remember your names ye may remember them; and when ye remember them ye may remember their works; and when ye remember their works ye may know how that it is said, and also written, that they were good. (Hel 5:6)

We do not know the meanings of the names Lehi and Nephi, but we do know, as Helaman reminded his sons, that the names stood for steadfastness and goodness. Because the first Lehi and Nephi were true to their charge to lead their little branch of Israel out of a wicked world and initiate a new gospel dispensation in America, because they sacrificed all and forsook the treasures of this world, and because they sought for the Lord and found him, basked in the light of his Spirit and power, and endured the crosses associated with total Christian commitment, their names are and forever will be enshrined among the sanctified. To be named after Nephi or Lehi is to be designated and identified, but, more appropriately, it is to be called and enlisted in the works they performed and the righteousness they brought to pass. One could hardly bear the names of Nephi and Lehi without being motivated by the memory of what they had done. “Therefore, my sons,” Helaman continued, “I would that ye should do that which is good, that it may be said of you, and also written, even as it has been said and written of them” (Hel 5:7).

Helaman counseled his sons to glory in their Lord and Redeemer, never in themselves or in their names. "And now my sons," he added, "behold I have somewhat more to desire of you, which desire is, that ye may not do these things that ye may boast, but that ye may do these things to lay up for yourselves a treasure in heaven, yea, which is eternal, and which fadeth not away; yea, that ye may have that precious gift of eternal life, which we have reason to suppose hath been given to our fathers" (Hel 5:8). Simply stated, we are not assured of the highest heaven in the celestial world because of our parentage, surname, or given name. Ancestry and heritage can guarantee nothing more than a great legacy, a memory, and a motivation to goodness. To be sure, all of us, whether reared in the Church or converts, are under covenant to be true to our shared heritage, to those who went before, who gave their lives that we might enjoy the privileges of Church membership today. We have a moral obligation to be loyal to the royal within us, to be true to our good names, to bear them with dignity and fidelity.

Nephi and Lehi were called to bear a name, however, which was more significant than that of their noble forebears. It is a name that is above every name that is named, whether on earth or in heaven, save only the name of the Almighty Elohim. It is a name that brings joy to the desolate heart, a name that speaks peace to the sorrowing soul. It is a name that falls in hushed and hallowed tones from the lips of Saints and angels, a name that leads true believers on both sides of the veil to glory and honor everlasting. It is the name of the One sent of God to bring salvation, the name of the One who paid an infinite price to ransom us from Satan's grasp. It is the blessed name of Jesus Christ.

We do not fully appreciate the significance of bearing the name of the Lord until we sense what our plight would be had Jesus not redeemed a lost and fallen world. The fall of Adam and Eve, though a fortunate fall and an essential step toward mortality and thus a pillar in the plan of salvation, brought about dramatic changes in the earth and all forms of life on it. Spiritual death represents an alienation from God, in a sense a

disinheritance from the royal family. Unless appropriate reconciliation with the family head is made, the blessings and the family name may be lost. That is, unless an atonement, an at-one-ment, is brought to pass, we lose that kind of association and sociality, that family life which the scriptures denominate as eternal life. We are then nameless and familyless, spiritual orphans, and thereby alone in the world. From an eternal perspective, in the words of Malachi, we have neither root nor branch (see 3 Nephi 25:1). In order to experience those joys and feel that warmth known only in family living, we must be reinstated in the family, literally re-deemed or deemed worthy once again of the privileges and opportunities of being called sons or daughters of God. Deliverance from this state—redemption from spiritual death—is made available only through the labors of a god, through the majestic ministry of one mightier than death, one upon whom justice had no claims and death had no hold. In order to be released from carnality and restored to righteousness, men and women must exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ and thus receive the blessings of the Atonement; they must put off the natural man through Christ, must crucify the old man of sin spoken of in Romans 6:6, and rise through their Redeemer unto a newness of life (Mosiah 3:19).

Because people are not born in mortality into the family of God, because on earth we are estranged by the Fall from holiness, we must be *adopted* into that family—must comply with the laws of adoption, must meet the legal requirements. This is accomplished through subscribing to and receiving what Joseph Smith called the “articles of adoption,” the first principles and ordinances of the gospel (see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 328; hereafter *TPJS*; see also *Pratt* 48). As the Savior and foreordained Messiah, Jesus, our Lord, became the “author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb 5:9), and the Father’s gospel, the gospel of God (see Rom 1:1–3), became his gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Father of salvation, the Father of resurrection, and the Father of redemption. He is also the King of kings, and

spiritual adoption represents acceptance into his family kingdom. Those who have been born again become members of the family of Christ and thus take upon them the family name—they become Christians in the true and full sense of that word and are obligated by covenant to live by the rules and regulations of the royal family, to live a life befitting the new and sacred name they have taken.

It is in the spirit of this doctrine—the new birth and the new name—that Helaman again appeals to memory: “O remember, remember, my sons, the words which king Benjamin spake unto his people; yea, remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world” (Hel 5:9). More specifically, Benjamin testified that “there shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:17). Salvation, meaning exaltation and eternal life, cannot come in any other way; it cannot be brought to pass through humanity’s devising or genius. There is nothing people can do to save themselves; they can, as we shall discuss shortly, place themselves in a position to be saved, can yield their hearts and focus their faith on the Master, but they cannot save themselves any more than they can create themselves. And in no other name—not that of the grandest Apostle or the mightiest prophet—can this greatest of all gifts be bestowed. Had there been no Christ, had there been no Advocate with the Father, no Mediator, no Intercessor for the children of men, then no amount of good works on the part of fallen man could have made up the difference. As Benjamin declared: “Men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children, and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (v 18).

Deliverance from Sin, Not in Sin

Helaman calls his sons to remembrance once again, this time to the words of Amulek spoken to Zeezrom the lawyer a half-century earlier (see Alma 11:34–37). “[Amulek] spake unto [Zeezrom] . . . that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them in their sins, but to redeem them from their sins” (Hel 5:10). This is an old issue, much older than Amulek’s encounter with Zeezrom. It dates, in fact, to the War in Heaven. Lucifer, a son of the morning, rebelled against the plan of the Father and offered his own amendments: “Behold, here am I,” he said, “send me, I will be thy son, and *I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost*, and surely I will do it; wherefore, give me thine honor” (Moses 4:1; emphasis added).

We note that there is no mention in this scriptural passage of coercion, of force, of denied agency. Though such things may have been necessary eventually to bring to pass Lucifer’s nefarious purposes, they certainly would not have been a part of his public proclamation or proposal. Instead, Satan simply proposed to save us all. Joseph Smith observed: “The contention in heaven was—Jesus said there would be certain souls that would not be saved; and *the devil said he could save them all*, and laid his plans before the grand council, who gave their vote in favor of Jesus Christ. So the devil rose up in rebellion against God, and was cast down, with all who put up their heads for him” (TPJS 357; emphasis added). Satan cannot make saints out of untried and untested souls. Salvation cannot come to those who have not experienced temptation, been exposed to sin and spiritual sickness, and overcome it all through the application of divine powers.

Nor can a place in heaven be given to those of us who remain in our sins. Christ came to earth on a search and rescue mission; he came to search out those who yearn for higher and greater things than an everlasting residence in this terrestrial tenement, those who desire more than life itself to be

transformed into the image of Christ himself. The Atonement of our Lord is infinite in scope. It is endless and eternal, but it has limitations; it cannot save any *in* their sins, meaning it cannot bestow power and glory and eternal life upon those who are unrepentant, unclean, and unprepared for celestial society. It cannot, as Alma explained to Corianton, restore one from debauchery and depravity to purity and holiness, cannot deliver one from mortal wickedness to immortal happiness (see Alma 41). Jesus Christ is a God of justice, just as he is a God of mercy. Though his arms of mercy are forever extended to the sinner, he cannot tolerate sin. To do so would be to go against his very nature. Abinadi thus explained that those who rebel against truth and die in their sins, those who have known the commandments and refuse to keep them “have no part in the first resurrection. . . . For salvation cometh to none such; for the Lord hath redeemed none such; yea, neither can the Lord redeem such; for *he cannot deny himself; for he cannot deny justice* when it has its claim” (Mosiah 15:26–27; emphasis added).

We might add that salvation does not come to a people who glory in repentance. Repentance is a necessary part of redemption in Christ, but we must always remember and teach our children that prevention is far, far better than redemption. As Joseph Smith counseled: “Repentance is a thing that cannot be trifled with every day. Daily transgression and daily repentance”—that is, constantly returning to the well in search of the cleansing waters when we have not sought to forsake or prevent sinful contacts—“is not that which is pleasing in the sight of God” (TPJS 148). We could not believe and teach otherwise and claim divine approbation. “The more I see of life,” President Harold B. Lee observed, “the more I am convinced that we must impress [the Saints] . . . with the awfulness of sin rather than to content ourselves with merely teaching the way of repentance” (88). “Yes, one can repent of . . . transgression,” declared President Ezra Taft Benson. “The miracle of forgiveness is real, and true repentance is accepted of the Lord. But it is not pleasing to the Lord to sow one’s wild oats . . . and then expect that planned

confession and quick repentance will satisfy the Lord” (*Teachings* 70). Any form of what Elder Neal A. Maxwell has called “ritual prodigalism” (33)—a deliberate detour, a programmed and predetermined plan to stray from the path and return eventually and effortlessly—evidences that we are still “in sin” and thus desperately in need of redemption.

Sometimes we tend to focus so much upon the fact that Jesus Christ *died for us* that we do not attend to an equally important facet of his redemptive enterprise—the fact that he also came to *live in us*. It is marvelous beyond the power of expression to contemplate that the Savior can and does forgive our sins. There is no way in our present state to comprehend how and in what manner this miracle of miracles was and is brought to pass. It simply happens. And thanks be to God that it does happen. But we cannot enjoy the full and complete powers of the atonement of Christ until our redemption from sin entails the re-creation of a nature which is foreign to sin. That is to say, Jesus came to cleanse us from guilt and the taints of transgression; he also came to renovate our nature and empower our souls that we are delivered, in process of time, from the effects and pull of those transgressions. We are not in the ultimate sense, therefore, redeemed from our sins, to use Amulek’s and Helaman’s words, until those sins have no more power over us. The additional wonder and beauty of the Atonement is that we are not expected to resist sin by will power and personal resolve alone, though such things are essential; rather, as we come to gain that life which is in Christ—a life which comes as we seek for and cultivate the Spirit of the Lord—we receive that enabling power which extends to us the strength to forsake and overcome, a power which we could not have generated on our own. Elder B. H. Roberts explained that

after the sins of the past are forgiven, the one so pardoned will doubtless feel the force of sinful habits bearing heavily upon him. . . .

There is an absolute necessity for some additional sanctifying grace that will strengthen poor human nature, not only to enable it to resist temptation, but also to root out from the heart concupiscence—the blind tendency or inclination to evil. The heart must be purified,

every passion, every propensity made submissive to the will, and the will of man brought into subjection to the will of God.

Man's natural powers are unequal to this task; so, I believe, all will testify who have made the experiment. Mankind stand in some need of a strength superior to any they possess of themselves, to accomplish this work of rendering pure our fallen nature. Such strength, such power, such a sanctifying grace is conferred on man in being born of the Spirit—in receiving the Holy Ghost. Such, in the main, is its office, its work. (169–70; emphasis added)

“I am crucified with Christ,” the Apostle Paul wrote; “nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20; emphasis added). As the Lord, through his Spirit, comes to live in us in this manner, we literally take part in an exchange with the Master. “We pray you in Christ’s stead,” Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “be ye reconciled to God.” And now comes his discussion of this unspeakable exchange: “For [the Father] hath made [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:20–21; emphasis added). In short, we are redeemed from sin as the Lord takes our sins upon himself and imputes his righteousness to us.

Redemption Through the Power of the Father

Helaman went on to explain by what means, by what power the Savior could perform his divine labors: “And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance” (Hel 5:11). In this brief statement is embodied the doctrine of the divine sonship of Christ. In it is to be found the reason why Jesus alone could and did bring to pass and put into effect the great plan of mercy. Jesus did what he did because of who he was. He was sinless, but this was not sufficient to allow him to redeem humanity. His was a voluntary offering, but his pure motives alone did not provide the means to make the atoning sacrifice. Jesus was the son of Elohim, the Almighty God. President Ezra Taft Benson declared: “The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which He performed His mission in the flesh was sired by that same Holy Being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was He begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the Son of the Eternal Father!" (*Come Unto Christ* 4). As the son of Elohim, Jesus inherited the powers of life and immortality. He was a man, but was more than man. He was human, but performed acts that required a superhuman endowment. On the other hand, as the son of Mary, a mortal woman, Jesus was subject to the throes and pulls of this mortal sphere. From Mary he inherited the capacity to suffer and die.

In the words of Abinadi, the Messiah would be many things—spirit and flesh, God and man, Father and Son (see Mosiah 15:1–4). Only by having such a nature could our Lord surrender to death and also rise from the tomb and win the victory over death. "Therefore doth my Father love me," he stated in Jerusalem, "because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (John 10:17–18). Lehi affirmed to Jacob that "there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, *who layeth down his life according to the flesh*"—his mortal inheritance—"and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit"—his immortal inheritance—"that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise" (2 Nephi 2:8; emphasis added).

Christ's divine nature allowed him to do more than bring about the resurrection, to transcend physical death and open the door for all other mortals to eventually do the same. In Helaman's words, "he hath power given unto him from the Father *to redeem them from their sins* because of repentance" (Hel 5:11; emphasis added). In a way that is incomprehensible to us, the Son of Man bore the effects of the sins of all the sons and daughters of humankind. In an act of infinite irony, the

sinless One became the great sinner (see 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Heb 2:9) and assumed the awful agony of those burdens in Gethsemane and then again on Calvary. He who had always walked in the light of God's Spirit was left to tread the winepress alone, so very alone and without that comforting and confirming influence which had always been a constant companion. He who had brought life and light to the world was subjected to the powers of death and darkness. He who deserved to suffer least suffered most. In the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the Mediator "descended in suffering below that which man can suffer; or, in other words, he suffered greater sufferings and was exposed to more powerful contradictions than any man can be" (*Lectures on Faith* 5:2). In doing so our Lord and Master descended below all things (2 Cor 8:9; Eph 4:8–10; D&C 88:6). Elder Boyd K. Packer has taught:

Before the crucifixion and afterward, many men have willingly given their lives in selfless acts of heroism. But none faced what the Christ endured. Upon Him was the burden of all human transgression, all human guilt. . . . In choosing He faced the awesome power of the evil one, who was not confined to flesh nor subject to mortal pain. . . . How the Atonement was wrought we do not know. No mortal watched as evil turned away and hid in shame before the light of that pure being. All wickedness could not quench that light. When what was done was done, the ransom had been paid. Both death and hell forsook their claim on all who would repent. Men at last were free. Then every soul who ever lived could choose to touch that light and be redeemed. (*Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled* 76)

Jesus the Christ was able to do for us what we could not do for ourselves because he had been endowed and empowered to do so. C. S. Lewis observed:

I have heard some people complain that if Jesus was God as well as man, then His sufferings and death lose all value in their eyes, "because it must have been so easy for him." Others may (very rightly) rebuke the ingratitude and ungraciousness of this objection; what staggers me is the misunderstanding it betrays. In one sense, of course, those who make it are right. They have even understated their own case. The perfect submission, the perfect suffering, the perfect death were . . . possible only because He was God. But surely that

is a very odd reason for not accepting them? . . . If I am drowning in a rapid river, a man who still has one foot on the bank may give me a hand which saves my life. Ought I to shout back (between my gasps) “No, it’s not fair! You have an advantage! You’re keeping one foot on the bank”? That advantage—call it “unfair” if you like—is the only reason why he can be of any use to me. To what will you look for help if you will not look to that which is stronger than yourself? (61)

The power of the Father enabled his Only Begotten to endure the physical, mental, and spiritual anguish associated with bleeding from every pore, suffering “both body and spirit” (D&C 19:18), and bearing up under a load greater than mortal mind can fathom (see Mosiah 3:7).

The blessings of life and light and liberation from a sinful nature—available because of the love and condescension of the Holy One of Israel—come to those who acknowledge their dire condition and turn to Christ through repentance. Lehi thus declared that “redemption cometh in and through the holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth” (2 Nephi 2:6–8). No message is more central, no pronouncement more poignant. For this reason, as Helaman explained, God “hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth [people] unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls” (Hel 5:11).

The Rock of Our Redeemer

Every person builds a house of faith. We do so knowingly or unknowingly. And every builder soon learns that a good building with bad foundations is worse than useless; it is dangerous. As one Christian writer has observed, “If the stability of buildings depends largely on their foundations, so

does the stability of human lives. The search for personal security is a primal instinct, but many fail to find it today. Old familiar landmarks are being obliterated. Moral absolutes which were once thought to be eternal are being abandoned" (Stott 22). Thus our house of faith can be no more secure than the foundation upon which it is built. Foolish men build upon the shifting sands of ethics and the marshlands of human philosophies and doctrines. The wise build upon the rock of revelation, heeding carefully the living oracles, lest they be "brought under condemnation . . . and stumble and fall when the storms descend, and the winds blow, and the rains descend, and beat upon their house" (D&C 90:5). All that we do as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints must be built upon a foundation of faith and testimony and conversion. When external supports fail us, then our hearts must be riveted upon the things of the Spirit, those internal realities which provide the meaning, the perspective, and the sustenance for all else that matters in life.

A very old story among the Jews holds that during the early stages of construction of the second temple, the builders, by mistake, discarded the cornerstone. Centuries later, in the midst of a long day of debate, Jesus, seemingly drawing upon this story, spoke of the irony associated with ignoring or dismissing him and his message. "Did ye never read in the scriptures," he asked, "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?" (Matt 21:42; compare Ps 118:22-23; Acts 4:11). Among the Nephites, Jacob prophesied: "I perceive by the workings of the Spirit which is in me, that by the stumbling of the Jews they will reject the stone upon which they might build and have safe foundation" (Jacob 4:15).

It is appropriate, therefore, that the climax of Helaman's commission to his sons contains the following admonition:

And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds,

yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall. (Hel 5:12)

Surely the supreme challenge of this life for those of us who aspire to Christian discipleship is to build our lives on Christ, to erect our house of faith, a divine domicile in which he and his Spirit would be pleased to dwell. There is safety from Satan and his minions only in Christ. There is security only in his word and through his infinite and eternal power.

How, then, do we build on Christ? In a day when the winds are blowing and the waves are beating upon our ship, how do we navigate our course safely into the peaceful harbor? What must we do to have our Savior pilot us through life's tempestuous seas? Amidst the babble of voices—enticing voices which threaten to lead us into forbidden paths or which beckon us to labor in secondary causes—how do the Saints of the Most High know the Way, live the Truth, and gain that Life which is abundant? The revelations and the prophets offer us some simple yet far-reaching suggestions:

Treasure Up His Word

The scriptures are the words of Christ. They contain the warnings and doctrinal teachings of those who were moved upon by the Holy Ghost and who thus spoke with the tongue of angels (see 2 Nephi 31:13; 32:1–3; 33:10). To read and ponder them is to hear the voice of the Master (see D&C 18:34–36). Holy writ has been preserved to bring us to Christ and to establish us upon his doctrine. Those who are serious students of the revelations, who seek diligently to know and apply scriptural precepts and principles—they can more readily see the hand of God and can also discern the handiwork of Lucifer. Such persons are more equipped to sift and sort through the sordid, more prepared to distinguish the divine from the diabolical, the sacred from the secular.

Mormon explained that “whosoever will may lay hold upon the word of God, which is quick and powerful, which shall divide asunder all the cunning and the snares and the wiles of the devil, and lead the man of Christ in a strait and narrow course across that everlasting gulf of misery which is prepared to engulf the wicked” (Hel 3:29). The word of God, especially that found in the canon of scripture, allows us to discern and expose those teachings or schools of thought which lead us on intellectual or spiritual detours, to cut through false educational ideas, and to discard spurious notions which may be pleasing to the carnal mind but are in fact destructive to the eternal soul. Further, those who search and study the institutional revelations open themselves more fully to that individual revelation which is promised. Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained to Church leaders that “however talented men may be in administrative matters; however eloquent they may be in expressing their views; however learned they may be in worldly things—they will be denied the sweet whisperings of the Spirit that might have been theirs unless they pay the price of studying, pondering, and praying about the scriptures” (*Doctrines* 238). Those who are grounded and settled in truth, anchored to the Lord’s word, are built upon the rock of Christ. Or, to complete Mormon’s thought, those men and women of Christ who manage to lay hold upon the word of God and follow the strait and narrow path, eventually “land their souls, yea, their immortal souls, at the right hand of God in the kingdom of heaven, to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and with Jacob, and with all our holy fathers, to go no more out” (Hel 3:30).

Teach His Doctrine

There is a supernal power which accompanies the plain and direct teaching of doctrine. The views and philosophies of men—no matter how pleasingly they are stated or how lofty and timely they may seem—simply cannot engage the soul the same way the doctrines of the gospel can. If we teach doctrine,

particularly the doctrine of Christ, and if we do so with the power and persuasion of the Holy Ghost, our listeners will be turned to Christ.

The gospel is the glad tidings—the good news that Christ has come into the world (see 3 Nephi 27; D&C 76:40–42), broken the bands of death, and made eternal life available through faithful obedience to him and his principles and ordinances. The gospel is the doctrine of Christ (see 2 Nephi 31; Jacob 7:6). When we preach the gospel we preach Jesus Christ and him crucified. Joseph Smith was asked: “What are the fundamental principles of your religion?” He answered: “The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the apostles and prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it” (*TPJS* 121). This declaration says something about what we ought to teach as well as what we ought to stress. Other doctrines or programs or policies, no matter their inherent and even obvious value, will have light and power breathed into them only to the degree that they are attached to this fundamental verity. “Truth, glorious truth, proclaims there is . . . a Mediator,” Elder Boyd K. Packer testified.

Through Him mercy can be fully extended to each of us without offending the eternal law of justice. *This truth is the very root of Christian doctrine. You may know much about the gospel as it branches out from there, but if you only know the branches and those branches do not touch that root, if they have been cut free from that truth, there will be no life nor substance nor redemption in them.* (“The Mediator” 56; emphasis added)

Sustain His Servants

The Savior taught his apostles in the eastern hemisphere: “He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me” (Matt 10:40). To the Nephites the resurrected Lord said: “Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed unto the words of these twelve whom I have chosen from among you

to minister unto you, and to be your servants” (3 Nephi 12:1). To receive the apostles meant to accept them as the mouthpiece of Deity, recognizing their voice as his voice and their authority as his authority. Certainly no one could accept the Father while rejecting the Son, and no one could accept the Son while rejecting those he had commissioned to act in his name. A rejection of Peter, James, Nephi, or any of his apostolic ministers was at the same time a rejection of Jesus.

There are members who feel they can enjoy a relationship with the Lord independent of his Church, separate and apart from the organization established by revelation. There are even those who feel they can stay close to the Lord while they criticize or find fault with the Church and its leaders. They are wrong. They are deceived. They are painfully mistaken and are walking in slippery paths. No person comes to the Master who does not acknowledge the mantle worn by his anointed. There is no power to be found in Christ independent of his constituted priesthood authorities. In the words of Elder Marvin J. Ashton, “Any Church member not obedient to the leaders of this Church will not have the opportunity to be obedient to the promptings of the Lord” (23).

Trust In and Rely on the Lord

There is power in Christ, power not only to create the worlds and divide the seas but also to still the storms of the human heart, to heal the pain of scarred and beaten souls. We must learn to trust in him more, in the arm of flesh less. We must learn to rely on him more, on solutions of humanity less. We must learn to surrender our burdens more. We must learn to work to our limits and then be willing to seek that grace or enabling power which will make up the difference, that consummate power which indeed makes all the difference. As C. S. Lewis pointed out:

In one sense, the road back to God is a road of moral effort, of trying harder and harder. But in another sense it is not trying that is ever

going to bring us home. All this trying leads up to the vital moment at which you turn to God and say, "You must do this. I can't." Do not, I implore you, start asking yourselves, "Have I reached that moment?" Do not sit down and start watching your own mind to see if it is coming along. That puts a man quite on the wrong track. When the most important things in our life happen we quite often do not know, at the moment, what is going on. A man does not always say to himself, "Hullo! I'm growing up." It is often only when he looks back that he realises what has happened and recognises it as what people call "growing up." You can see it even in simple matters. A man who starts anxiously watching to see whether he is going to sleep is very likely to remain wide awake. As well, the thing I am talking of now may not happen to every one in a sudden flash . . . it may be so gradual that no one could ever point to a particular hour or even a particular year. And what matters is the nature of the change in itself, not how we feel while it is happening. *It is the change from being confident about our own efforts to the state in which we despair of doing anything for ourselves and leave it to God.*

I know the words "leave it to God" can be misunderstood, but they must stay for the moment. *The sense in which a Christian leaves it to God is that he puts all his trust in Christ: trusts that Christ will somehow share with him the perfect human obedience which He carried out from His birth to His crucifixion: that Christ will make the man more like Himself and, in a sense, make good his deficiencies. . . .* In yet another sense, handing everything over to Christ does not, of course, mean that you stop trying. *To trust Him means, of course, trying to do all that He says.* There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. *But trying in a new way, a less worried way.* (128–29; emphasis added)

The Satanic shafts in the whirlwind may take many forms. They may come in the form of temptations described by President Joseph F. Smith: enticements to be immoral, to yield to the "flattery of prominent men," or to succumb to "false educational ideas" (313). We may be tempted to judge all things, including the gospel and the Church, through the lenses of our own academic discipline or professional position. In this regard Elder Dallin H. Oaks has recently written:

We can liken the various ways of the world to implements that can draw water from a worldly well. We need such implements. We can and do use them to make our way in the world.

But while we are doing this, in our occupations, in our civic responsibilities, and in our work in other organizations, we must never forget the Savior's words, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." Only from Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior of this world, can we obtain the living water whose partaker shall never thirst again, in whom it will be "a well of water springing up into everlasting life." And we do not obtain that water with worldly implements. (14)

Whatever may come in the mighty storms that shall beat upon our houses of faith—and they shall come, as surely as the Lord lives—we shall be able to withstand and endure, if we are properly grounded. Satan shall not have power sufficient to drag us down to hell, to that gulf of misery and wo, if we will have built securely on the rock of our Redeemer (Hel 5:12).

Conclusion

There are few gifts of the Spirit of greater worth in a day of doubt and a time of confusion than the gift of discernment. We have the challenge of not only discerning good from evil, light from darkness, but also that which matters from that which is of but little value. In a time like our own when a babble of voices is heard, discordant voices which vie for our attention and seek for our time and interest, it is incumbent upon us to be discerning, to be discriminating. Some things simply matter more than others. But, in the words of Alma, "there is one thing which is of more importance than they all" (Alma 7:7). That something is the knowledge and testimony of Jesus, the calm certitude which comes by the spirit of revelation. We may know many things, but if we do not know this, our testimony is deficient and our foundation less solid than it might otherwise be. "Upon this rock"—the rock of revelation, the Master said at Caesarea Philippi—"I will build my church" (Matt 16:18; *TPJS* 274). "And how could it be otherwise?" Elder Bruce R. McConkie asked.

There is no other foundation upon which the Lord could build his Church and kingdom. The things of God are known only by the power of his Spirit. God stands revealed or he remains forever unknown. No man can know that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.

Revelation: Pure, perfect, personal revelation—this is the rock!

Revelation that Jesus is the Christ: the plain, wondrous word that comes from God in heaven to man on earth, the word that affirms the divine Sonship of our Lord—this is the rock!

The divine Sonship of our Lord: the sure, heaven-sent word that God is his Father and that he has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel—this is the rock!

The testimony of our Lord: the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy—this is the rock!

All this is the rock, and yet there is more. *Christ is the Rock:* the Rock of Ages, the Stone of Israel, the Sure Foundation—the Lord is our Rock! (“Upon This Rock” 77; emphasis in original)

Truly, as the Apostle Paul testified: “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11).

Save only what is written in scripture, perhaps nowhere do we find the invitation and the challenge to build upon the rock of our Redeemer taught so forcefully as in hymns. Consider the words of E. Mote:

My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
no merit of my own I claim,
but wholly trust in Jesus’ name.

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand—
all other ground is sinking sand.

When weary in this earthly race,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
in every wild and stormy gale
my anchor holds and will not fail.

His vow, his covenant and blood
are my defence against the flood;
when earthly hopes are swept away
he will uphold me on that day.

When the last trumpet's voice shall sound,
O may I then in him be found!
clothed in his righteousness alone,
faultless to stand before his throne.

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand—
all other ground is sinking sand.
(qtd. Stott 29)

Or, ponder the significance of the words of a hymn we
frequently sing:

How firm a foundation, ye Saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!
What more can he say than to you he hath said,
Who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?

* * * * *

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply.
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

E'en down to old age, all my people shall prove
My sov'reign, eternal, unchangeable love;
And then, when gray hair shall their temples adorn,
Like lambs shall they still in my bosom be borne.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,

I'll never, no never, no never forsake!
(*Hymns* 88)

Those who accept the invitation to “come unto Christ and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32) thus come out of the world, enjoy citizenship with the Saints of the Most High, and erect their houses of faith on “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph 2:19–20).

On Christ’s mighty arm we rely. Because of who he is and what he has done, there is no obstacle to eternal life too great to overcome. Because of him, our minds may be at peace, our souls may rest. As Helaman told Nephi and Lehi:

And now, my sons, remember, remember that it is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, yea, his shafts in the whirlwind, yea, when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to the gulf of misery and endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, a foundation whereon if men build they cannot fall. (Hel 5:12)

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