

Teachings Concerning Gospel Doctrine



David A. Bednar Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

A gospel doctrine is a truth—a truth of salvation revealed by a loving Heavenly Father. Gospel doctrines are eternal, do not change, and pertain to the eternal progression and exaltation of Heavenly Father's sons and daughters. Doctrine such as the nature of the Godhead, the plan of happiness, and the Atonement of Jesus Christ are foundational, fundamental, and comprehensive. The core doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ are relatively few in number.

Gospel doctrines answer the question of "why?" For example, the doctrine of the plan of happiness answers the questions of why we are here upon the earth, why marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God, and why the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children. The doctrine of the Godhead helps us to understand why we are to become perfect even as our Father in Heaven and His Son Jesus Christ are perfect (see Matthew 5:48; 3 Nephi 12:48). The doctrine of the Atonement explains why Jesus Christ is our mediator and advocate with the Father (1 Timothy 2:5; Doctrine and Covenants 45:3).

The doctrines of the restored gospel are found in the standard works of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in the teachings of the living prophets and apostles, and in the authorized declarations and proclamations of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Ultimately, however, only the President of the Church and the Quorum of the First Presidency have the authority to define the doctrines of the Church. (Increase in Learning [2011], pp. 151-152)

Neil L. Andersen Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

A few question their faith when they find a statement made by a Church leader decades ago that seems incongruent with our doctrine. There is an important principle that governs the doctrine of the Church. The doctrine is taught by all 15 members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. It is not hidden in an obscure paragraph of one talk. True principles are taught frequently and by many. Our doctrine is not difficult to find. ("Trial of Your Faith," Ensign, Nov. 2012)

D. Todd Christofferson Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "we believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (Articles of Faith 1:9). This is to say that while there is much we do not yet know, the truths and doctrine we have received have come and will continue to come by divine revelation. In some faith traditions, theologians claim equal teaching authority with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and doctrinal matters may become a contest of opinions between them. Some rely on the ecumenical councils of the Middle Ages and their creeds. Others place primary emphasis on the reasoning of post-apostolic theologians or on biblical hermeneutics and exegesis. We value scholarship that enhances

understanding, but in the Church today, just as anciently, establishing the doctrine of Christ or correcting doctrinal deviations is a matter of divine revelation to those the Lord endows with apostolic authority.

In 1954, President J. Reuben Clark Jr., then a counselor in the First Presidency, explained how doctrine is promulgated in the Church and the preeminent role of the President of the Church. Speaking of members of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, he stated: "[We] should [bear] in mind that some of the General Authorities have had assigned to them a special calling; they possess a special gift; they are sustained as prophets, seers, and revelators, which gives them a special spiritual endowment in connection with their teaching of the people. They have the right, the power, and authority to declare the mind and will of God to his people, subject to the over-all power and authority of the President of the Church. Others of the General Authorities are not given this special spiritual endowment and authority covering their teaching; they have a resulting limitation, and the resulting limitation upon their power and authority in teaching applies to every other officer and member of the Church, for none of them is spiritually endowed as a prophet, seer, and revelator. Furthermore, as just indicated, the President of the Church has a further and special spiritual endowment in this respect, for he is the Prophet, Seer, and Revelator for the whole Church." (J. Reuben Clark Jr., "When Are Church Leaders' Words Entitled to Claim of Scripture?" Church News, July 31, 1954, 9–10)

How does the Savior reveal His will and doctrine to prophets, seers, and revelators? He may act by messenger or in His own person. He may speak by His own voice or by the voice of the Holy Spirit—a communication of Spirit to spirit that may be expressed in words or in feelings that convey understanding beyond words (see 1 Nephi 17:45; D&C 9:8). He may direct Himself to His servants individually or acting in council (see 3 Nephi 27:1–8).

These same patterns are followed today in the restored Church of Jesus Christ. The President of the Church may announce or interpret doctrines based on revelation to him (see, for example, D&C 138). Doctrinal exposition may also come through the combined council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (see, for example, Official Declaration 2). Council deliberations will often include a weighing of canonized scriptures, the teachings of Church leaders, and past practice. But in the end, just as in the New Testament Church, the objective is not simply consensus among council members but revelation from God. It is a process involving both reason and faith for obtaining the mind and will of the Lord.

At the same time it should be remembered that not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. It is commonly understood in the Church that a statement made by one leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, not meant to be official or binding for the whole Church. The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that "a prophet [is] a prophet only when he [is] acting as such." President Clark, quoted earlier, observed: ...

"... The Church will know by the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the body of the members, whether the brethren in voicing their views are 'moved upon by the Holy Ghost'; and in due time that knowledge will be made manifest." ("The Doctrine of Christ," Ensign, May 2012)

Boyd K. Packer Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

I desire to share a few thoughts about a basic doctrine of the Church. What I say is based on these convictions:

First: instruction vital to our salvation is not hidden in an obscure verse or phrase in the scriptures. To the contrary, essential truths are repeated over and over again.

Second: every verse, whether oft-quoted or obscure, must be measured against other verses. There are complementary and tempering teachings in the scriptures which bring a balanced knowledge of truth.

Next: there is a consistency in what the Lord says and what He does, that is evident in all creation. Nature can teach valuable lessons about spiritual and doctrinal matters. The Lord drew lessons from flowers and foxes, from seeds and salt, and sparrows and sunsets.

Fourth: not all that God has said is in the Bible. Other scriptures—the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price—have equal validity, and they sustain one another.

Fifth: while much must be taken on faith alone, there is individual revelation through which we may know the truth. "There is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." (Job 32:8.) What may be obscure in the scriptures can be made plain through the gift of the Holy Ghost. We can have as full an understanding of spiritual things as we are willing to earn.

And I add one more conviction: there is an adversary who has his own channels of spiritual communication. He confuses the careless and prompts those who serve him to devise deceptive, counterfeit doctrine, carefully contrived to appear genuine.

I mention this because now, as always, there are self-appointed spokesmen who scoff at what we believe and misrepresent what we teach. ("The Pattern of Our Parentage," Ensign, Nov. 1984, p.66)

Dallin H. Oaks Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Teachers who are commanded to teach "the principles of [the] gospel" and "the doctrine of the kingdom" (D&C 88:77) should generally forgo teaching specific rules or applications. For example, they would not teach any rules for determining what is a full tithing, and they would not provide a list of dos and don'ts for keeping the Sabbath day holy. Once a teacher has taught the doctrine and the associated principles from the scriptures and the living prophets, such specific applications or rules are generally the responsibility of individuals and families. ("Gospel Teaching," Ensign, Nov. 1999)

Jeffery R. Holland Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

We who are General Authorities and general officers are called to teach His general rules. You and we then lead specific lives and must seek the Lord's guidance regarding specific circumstances. But there would be mass confusion and loss of gospel promises if no general ideal and no doctrinal standard were established and, in our case today, repeated. We take great strength in knowing the Lord has spoken on these matters, and we accept His counsel even when it might not be popular. (From "General Patterns and

Specific Lives," Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting: Building Up A Righteous Posterity, February 9, 2008)

"Approaching Mormon Doctrine"

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—Newsroom
4 May 2007

Much misunderstanding about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints revolves around its doctrine. The news media is increasingly asking what distinguishes the Church from other faiths, and reporters like to contrast one set of beliefs with another.

The Church welcomes inquisitiveness, but the challenge of understanding Mormon doctrine is not merely a matter of accessing the abundant information available. Rather, it is a matter of how this information is approached and examined.

The doctrinal tenets of any religion are best understood within a broad context, and thoughtful analysis is required to understand them. News reporters pressed by daily deadlines often find that problematic. Therefore, as the Church continues to grow throughout the world and receive increasing media attention, a few simple principles that facilitate a better understanding may be helpful:

- Not every statement made by a Church leader, past or present, necessarily constitutes doctrine. A single statement made by a single leader on a single occasion often represents a personal, though well-considered, opinion, but is not meant to be officially binding for the whole Church. With divine inspiration, the First Presidency (the prophet and his two counselors) and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles (the second-highest governing body of the Church) counsel together to establish doctrine that is consistently proclaimed in official Church publications. This doctrine resides in the four "standard works" of scripture (the Holy Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price), official declarations and proclamations, and the Articles of Faith. Isolated statements are often taken out of context, leaving their original meaning distorted.
- Some doctrines are more important than others and might be considered core doctrines. For example, the precise location of the Garden of Eden is far less important than doctrine about Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice. The mistake that public commentators often make is taking an obscure teaching that is peripheral to the Church's purpose and placing it at the very center. This is especially common among reporters or researchers who rely on how other Christians interpret Latter-day Saint doctrine.

