We hear much about love as an element in teaching. This recalls an experience when our first little five-year-old trudged off alone to a great big school. I myself had been a principal of schools before, but somehow that morning was a very difficult morning for me. I went home for lunch; and, on some pretext or other, I went over to the school. And as I stood before the kindergarten teacher, embarrassed now that I was there and wondering what I was going to say to her, I finally blurted out, “Miss Sanders, we have sent to you today the most precious thing we have in all the world—our first little five-year-old. We are not concerned about the details of what you teach her—numbering, lettering, writing, and so on. There is only one thing that is in our hearts. We want you to love our little girl, and we want you to teach her to love you. If you’ll do that, that’s all we ask of you for our little girl.”

The more I have seen of teaching, the more I think that this is the great demand upon those who teach our children. You love them and teach them to love you, and I will take a chance on the outcome of your instruction.

Our responsibility in teaching the gospel is to inspire others to Christlike living. I know this is an all-inclusive statement, one so broad in its concepts that I would almost continue to the limit of my understanding of the gospel and I would not exhaust the possibilities of the subject. To put that statement more in the language of the scriptures would be to say, taking a declaration from the Master’s great Sermon on the Mount, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48.)

“Christlike living” is a phrase that I think we borrowed from other sources and is one not commonly found in scriptural references. Another scripture that might help explain it is relative to the incident of the splendid young man who came to the Master, as many inquiring youth have come to good teachers, asking, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” In other words, what must I have in order to become perfect or to live a Christlike life? The Master answered him:

... if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

In other words, He had said to the young man: “Keep the Ten Commandments if you would enter into life.”

The young man said unto Him, “All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?”

And then the Master’s reply: “... go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” Then Jesus told His disciples, as the young man turned sorrowfully away because he possessed many riches, how hard it is for them that trust in riches “to enter into the kingdom of God.” (See Matthew 19:16-24.)

What must I do to be saved? As I pondered these words, I thought of three essentials that are necessary to inspire one to live a Christlike life—or, speaking more accurately in the language of the scriptures, to live more perfectly as the Master lived. The first essential I would name in order to qualify is: There must be awakened in the individual who would be taught or who would live perfectly an awareness of his needs.

The rich young ruler did not need to be taught repentance from murder nor from murderous thoughts. He did not have to be schooled in how to repent from adultery, nor from stealing, lying, defrauding, or failing to honor his mother. All these he said he had observed from his youth; but his question was, “What lack I yet?”

The Master, with His keen discernment and the power of a Great Teacher, diagnosed the young man’s case perfectly: His need and his lack were to overcome his love for worldly things, his tendency to trust in riches. And then Jesus prescribed the effective remedy: “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.” (Matthew 19:21.)

In the Apostle Paul’s dramatic conversion, when he was physically blinded by the light while on his way to Damascus with letters of authority to persecute and stamp out that sect which he thought was perpetrating a serious heresy, he heard a voice that said to him: “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” And from the depths of this humbled Saul’s soul there came the question that is always asked by the one who senses that he needs
something: “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

Now the Master knew what Paul’s great trouble was. He was one of the most brilliant scholars of that community. He had studied under some of the greatest teachers. He was what we would call “worldly wise.” He thought he was doing God’s service. His energies were misdirected. But the Master knew his heart, and He knew that he was seeking to have the answer to what many others had asked Him: “What must I do to be saved?” And the Master answered, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Then Nicodemus said, “How can a man be born when he is old?”

Jesus answered, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3-5.)

A man must be “born again” if he would reach perfection, in order to see or enter into the kingdom of God. And how is one born again? That is the same question that Enos asked. And you remember the simple answer that came back: “Because of thy faith in Christ, whom thou hast never before heard nor seen. And many years pass away before he shall manifest himself in the flesh; wherefore, go to, thy faith hath made thee whole.” (Enos 8.)

Brother Marion D. Romney and I were sitting in the office one day when a young man came in. He was getting ready to go on a mission, and he had been interviewed in the usual way and had made confessions of certain transgressions of his youth. But he said to us, “I’m not satisfied by just having confessed. How can I know that I have been forgiven?” In other words, “How do I know that I am born again?” He felt he could not go on a mission in his present state.

As we talked, Brother Romney said: “Son, do you remember what King Benjamin said? He was preaching to some who had been pricked in their hearts because of their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men. And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having a peace of conscience, because of their exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ…. “ (Mosiah 4:2-3.)

Brother Romney said to him, “My son, you wait and pray until you have the peace of conscience because of your faith in Jesus Christ’s atonement, and you will know
that your sins then have been forgiven.” Except for that, as Elder Romney explained, any one of us is impoverished, and we are wandering in a fog until we have had that rebirth.

In the Master’s farewell sermon to the Nephites, He said, “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. (3 Nephi 27:14.) Nephi had written, “For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” (2 Nephi 25:23.)

Almost the last thing that the Master said to the Nephites was, “And no unclean thing can enter into his kingdom… “ (3 Nephi 27:19.)

Now let us confess it, all of us are “sinners anonymous.” All of us have done things we ought not to have done, or we have neglected things we should have done; and every one of us has need for repentance. So let us not, as President Woodruff said, spend too much time confessing the other fellow’s sins. Ours is the responsibility to find our own need for repentance.

. . . 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.

And then the Savior added,

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. (3 Nephi 27:19-20.)

After they had pondered His words, He added: “. . . Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am.” (3 Nephi 27:27.) “Be ye therefore perfect,” He was saying to them, “even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

You cannot have a Christlike life, as the test would have it, without being born again. One would never be happy in the presence of the Holy One of Israel without this cleansing and purifying. Moroni said, “. . . I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell.” (Moroni 9:4.)

And then finally the third essential: to help the learner to know the gospel by living the gospel. Spiritual certainty that is necessary to salvation must be preceded by a maximum of individual effort. Grace, or the free gift of the Lord’s atoning power, must be preceded by personal striving. Repeating again what Nephi said, “By grace . . . we are saved, after all we can do.”

I listened to a mission president a few years ago tell of an interesting experience. He was at a district conference, and as usual he was interviewing a number of men who had been recommended to be ordained elders. The district president had written on one recommendation: “This man is still having a problem with tobacco.”

So the mission president said to the man, “Tell me about this problem with tobacco.”

The man answered, “Oh, president, more than all else in the world I want to stop this ugly habit so that I can be ordained an elder and take my wife and children to the temple.”

“Well,” the president said, “It ought to be very simple, then, if you mean what you say. Are you prepared to stand up and take me by the right hand, look me square in the eye, and tell me that from this time on you’ll never again touch tobacco?”

“Oh, well, no,” the man said, “I’m not prepared to do that.”

“Well, then,” said the president, “you didn’t mean what you said.” Then the president talked a little bit more and concluded: “The beginning of repentance is to make up your mind, and you haven’t made up your mind you are going to stop smoking. Now I’ll be back here in three months; and if in that time you can make up your mind, we’ll talk about ordaining you an elder.”

The man was crestfallen because he had failed again. The next afternoon as the president was preparing to leave at the conclusion of the conference, this man came to him and said, “President, I have been fasting and praying since you talked with me yesterday; and now I have made up my mind. I’m prepared now to take you by the right hand and look you square in the eye and tell you that from now on I’ll never touch tobacco.”

Then the mission president said a thrilling thing: “And down in my heart I knew he would do what he said, and I ordained him.” Now, that is one of the essentials if you would live a perfect life. One must “make up his mind” to live the commandments.

The Master answered a question of the Jews as to how they could be certain as to whether His mission was of God or whether He was just another man. He said: “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” (John 7:17.)

The testimony of truth never comes to him who has an unclean tabernacle. The Spirit of the Lord and uncleanliness cannot dwell at the same time in a given
individual. “I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say; but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise.” (D&C 82:10.) “. . . except ye abide my law ye cannot attain to this glory.”
(D&C 132:21.) Again and again that truth is repeated in the scriptures.

All the principles and ordinances of the gospel are in a sense but invitations to learning the gospel by the practice of its teachings. No person knows the principle of tithing until he pays tithing. No one knows the principle of the Word of Wisdom until he keeps the Word of Wisdom. Children, or grownups for that matter, are not converted to tithing, the Word of Wisdom, keeping the Sabbath day holy, or prayer by hearing someone talk about these principles. We learn the gospel by living it.

Be virtuous. This is one of the greatest of the commandments.

“Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.” [D&C 121:45]

But never in the world will we have that dominion, that power, that companionship of the Holy Ghost unless we have learned to be virtuous in thought, in habit, and in our actions.

May I say in summary: We never really know anything of the teachings of the gospel until we have experienced the blessings that come from living each principle. “Moral teachings themselves,” someone has said, “have only a superficial effect upon the spirit unless they are buttressed by acts.” The most important of all the commandments in the gospel to you and to me is that particular commandment which for this moment requires in each of us the greatest soul-searching to obey. Each of us must analyze his needs and begin today to overcome, for only as we overcome are we granted a place in our Father’s kingdom.

President Karl G. Maeser said, “School is a drill in the battle of life; but if we fail in the drill, we will fail in the battle.” “Education is not play,” as some wise teacher has said, “and cannot be made to look like play. It is hard, hard work, but it can be made interesting work.” Likewise education that pertains to the kingdom of God is not play, and it cannot be made to look like play. It is hard, hard work; but it can be intensely interesting work.

You and the lessons you teach are merely the tools by which the Holy Ghost converts the souls of men. James said it in more meaningful language than I can command:

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;

Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. (James 5:19-20.)

President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., said,

Youth of the Church are hungry for the words of the Lord. Teachers, be sure you are prepared to feed them the bread of life which are the teachings of Jesus Christ. If they will live up to His teachings, they will have more happiness than they have ever before dreamed of.

Within the revealed gospel of Jesus Christ and from the teachings of our church leaders in this dispensation may be found the answer to every question and the solution of every problem essential to the social, temporal, and spiritual welfare of human beings who are all the children of God our Heavenly Father. I so declare unto you, I know it is true.