

# *Follow the Doctrine and Gospel of Christ*

M. RUSSELL BALLARD

**Y**ou are a wonderful sight and the best young men and young women in the whole world. You have the restored gospel of Jesus Christ to guide your footsteps of faith in today's ever-increasingly wicked world. It is good for me and Sister Ballard to be with you this evening, both here in the Marriott Center and with all of you gathered in other buildings around the world. With modern technology, I suppose some of you are also listening via podcast feeds or other electronic marvels. But regardless of where you are tonight, I am grateful to speak to you, and I pray the Lord will bless us so what I say will be of help to each one of you in your lives at this time.

I express thanks to the Logan Institute of Religion choir for the beautiful music and a special appreciation to President Tom Mullen, one of the stake presidents here, who is one of the wonderful missionaries who served with Sister Ballard and me in the Canada Toronto Mission many years ago.

## **"O That Cunning Plan of the Evil One"**

Tonight I want to follow up on what I said at this past general conference. Those of you who were listening—and I hope that some of you might qualify—received counsel from the General Authorities and general officers of the

Church. You may remember that in my talk I compared the artificial flies used by fly fishermen to those artificial lures used by Satan to catch us and to reel us in to his awful world of misery.

I received a letter a few days after conference from a wonderful young man named Chayton Snider. He is 11 years old. He listened to me and sent a drawing along with this personal note:

*Fishermen reeling in the fish with an artificial lure symbolizes how Satan is "reeling" us in with addiction (the "artificial lure"). When the fisherman throws the fish onto the beach and the fish tries to "flop" back to the water, that "flopping" I think symbolizes how we struggle to get back to the safety of the "water" or the gospel, but we need help from Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ to get away from those addictions.<sup>1</sup>*

Thank you, Chayton, for your succinct synopsis of my conference address.

I quote from that talk:

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*M. Russell Ballard was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this fireside address was given on 7 November 2010.*

*Like the fly fisherman who knows that trout are driven by hunger, Lucifer knows our “hunger,” or weaknesses, and tempts us with counterfeit lures which, if taken, can cause us to be yanked from the stream of life into his unmerciful influence. And unlike a fly fisherman who catches and releases the fish unharmed back into the water, Lucifer will not voluntarily let go. His goal is to make his victims as miserable as he is.*<sup>2</sup>

### **Keep the Gospel of Jesus Christ Simple**

I pray the Lord will bless me in teaching a very important principle to you. The principle is “keep the gospel of Jesus Christ simple.” Paul the Apostle had the same concern in his day when he said, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent [the devil] beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

In the Book of Mormon, the prophet Nephi explained the doctrine and gospel of Christ in these simple terms. I am referring to statements from 2 Nephi, chapter 31.

- “For my soul delighteth in plainness” (verse 3).
- “Can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father?” (verse 10).
- “And the Father said: Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son” (verse 11).
- “He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost” (verse 12).
- “And I heard a voice from the Father, saying: Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved” (verse 15).
- “For ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him” (verse 19).
- “My beloved brethren, this is the way; and there is none other way nor name given under heaven whereby man can be saved in the kingdom of God” (verse 21).

- “And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ” (verse 21).

The Prophet Joseph Smith defined the first principles and ordinances of the gospel in the fourth article of faith: “First, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

I want to focus on the doctrine and gospel of Christ tonight. My dear young people, there are many things going on in the world today that are in direct opposition to the principles of the gospel. You must know the doctrine of Christ and live and defend it all the days of your life.

### **Give the Lord Equal Time**

Some years ago one of my missionaries came to see me. He said: “President, I am losing my testimony. I have some questions that no one will answer for me. My bishop and stake president just told me to forget them, and they had no answers.”

I asked for his questions in writing and then suggested he come to see me in 10 days, and I would answer every one of his questions.

As he was leaving my office, I was prompted to ask him, “Elder, how long has it been since you have read from the scriptures?”

He acknowledged that it had been a long time.

I said: “You have given me an assignment; it’s only fair that I give you one. You read at least one hour from the scriptures each day until you come back for your answers.”

He agreed to do this.

When he came back, I was ready. He said: “President, I don’t need the answers. I know the Book of Mormon is true. I know Joseph Smith is a prophet. I’m OK now.”

I replied: “You will get your answers anyway. I worked hard on them!” All of this anti-Mormon stuff was what we were dealing with.

After our discussion I asked him, “Elder, what have you learned from all of this?”

And he gave me a very significant response: “I’ve learned to give the Lord equal time!”

Now, together let’s review the basic doctrines and gospel of Christ.

### **Doctrinal Principle 1: Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ**

*The first doctrinal principle is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Having faith in Christ includes having a firm belief that He is the Only Begotten Son of God and the Savior and Redeemer of the world. [Our doctrine teaches] that we can return to live with our Heavenly Father only by relying on His Son’s grace and mercy. When we have faith in Christ, we accept and apply His Atonement and His teachings. We trust Him and what He says. We know that He has the power to keep His promises. Heavenly Father blesses those who have faith to obey His Son. . . .*

*We believe in Christ, and we believe that He wants us to keep all His commandments. We want to show our faith by obeying Him. . . .*

*. . . Through our faith in Jesus Christ, He can heal us, both physically and spiritually.<sup>3</sup>*

My dear young friends, take a minute now and concentrate on your own faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as I ask you a few questions:

1. Are you happy with the direction of your life and the depth of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?
2. Do you love God with all of your heart, soul, strength, and mind, as the Lord taught the lawyer in Luke 10? (See verse 27.)
3. Are you doing the simple things in your everyday life?
  - a. Are you saying your prayers every morning and every night?
  - b. Are you reading every day from the holy scriptures?
  - c. Are you using appropriate language?
  - d. Are you being honest?
  - e. Are you living the Word of Wisdom?
4. Are you being kind and thoughtful of the needs of those around you?
5. Are you following the counsel of the Brethren emphasized in this past conference to avoid completely *any kind* of pornography? Pornography cannot exist in our lives if we have true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I say with all the strength that I have: if this is a problem in your life, “Leave it alone!”
6. Are you living worthy of a temple recommend?
7. Are you actively participating in your Sunday meetings, especially sacrament meeting—partaking of the sacrament worthily and renewing your covenants with the Lord?
8. Are you returned missionaries maintaining the dignity of a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ in your dress and in your personal demeanor?
9. Are you preparing for and actively pursuing finding your eternal companion? I could spend the rest of the evening on this question, but I am sure by now you understand that we do not endorse “hanging out.” If you haven’t gotten that yet, get it tonight. In your vernacular, “Cool it!” We recommend proper dating—you know, it’s simple: a boy asks a girl for a date, and you have a good time together. Are you really looking for a companion who loves the Lord and honors His holy name?
10. Those of you who are married, are date nights a regular occurrence as you continue to build and strengthen your relationship?

There are other things, of course, that I could add to this list. However, if you are seriously striving to do your best to follow Christ, then

you can answer questions like these with a resounding Yes!

As you have thought tonight about your personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is there anything in your life now that you know is not what you want it to be? If there is anything that you know in your heart is not consistent with one who has real faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then let me tell you how to fix it.

### **Doctrinal Principle 2: Repentance**

*Repentance is the second doctrinal principle of the gospel.*

*Our faith in Christ and our love for Him lead us to repent, or to change our thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors that are not in harmony with His will. . . . When we repent, we feel godly sorrow, then we stop doing things that are wrong and [increase our efforts to do] things that are right. . . .*

*Sincere repentance brings several results. We feel God's forgiveness and His peace in our lives. Our guilt and sorrow are swept away.<sup>4</sup>*

Brothers and sisters, be grateful that by sincere repentance the gospel of Jesus Christ provides an escape from mistakes we may make. If one does not master the ability to repent, oftentimes little habits become an addiction. All of us can easily avoid being trapped by an addiction simply by not partaking of addictive substances or addictive practices. Make no mistake, my dear young friends, all of us are targets of Satan and his minions. He will use every deceitful lure or tactic he has to cause you and me to falter and drift in our commitments and faithful devotion to the Lord.

### **Doctrinal Principle 3: Baptism**

*The third doctrinal principle of the gospel is baptism. This principle most all of you within the sound of my voice have participated in. Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins is the first covenant that we make between*

*ourselves and the Lord Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. Baptism is an ordinance; it is "a sacred ceremony or rite that shows that we have entered into a covenant with God," and*

*God has always required His children to make covenants. A covenant is a binding and solemn agreement between God and man. God promises to bless us, and we promise to obey Him. . . . Keeping covenants brings blessings in this life and exaltation in the life to come.<sup>5</sup>*

Remember, Christ set the example for us by being baptized Himself. And we are blessed with the privilege of partaking of the sacrament each week, which "helps us remain worthy to have the Spirit with us always. It is a weekly reminder of our covenants"<sup>6</sup> and helps us to build our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Doctrinal Principle 4: The Gift of the Holy Ghost**

*The fourth doctrinal principle is the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

*Jesus taught that we must be baptized of water and also of the Spirit. Baptism by water must be followed by baptism of the Spirit or it is incomplete. Only when we receive baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost can we receive a remission of our sins and become completely spiritually reborn. . . .*

*. . . The Holy Ghost testifies of Christ and helps us recognize the truth. He provides spiritual strength and helps us do what is right. He [gives us peace and] comforts us during times of trial or sorrow. He warns us of spiritual or physical danger. . . . Through the power of the Holy Ghost we can feel God's love and direction for us. This gift is a foretaste of eternal joy and a promise of eternal life.<sup>7</sup>*

### **Doctrinal Principle 5: Endure to the End**

*And finally, the fifth doctrinal principle: we must endure to the end.*

*Once we have entered the strait and narrow path by our faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, and the ordinances of baptism and [receiving the Holy Ghost], we must exert every effort to stay on the path.*<sup>8</sup>

Years ago, our faithful stake patriarch, who was in his nineties, stood in fast and testimony meeting and said something I shall always remember: “I pray every night that God will see me safely dead with my testimony burning brightly.”

I said to him after the meeting, “Patriarch, of all the people I know, certainly you don’t need to worry about that anymore!”

He took hold of the lapels of my coat, jerked me up so that our faces were close together, looked me in the eyes, and said these words: “My boy”—I was married and had two children! “My boy, no one is secure until the very end.”

May it be so for each of us that we are faithful to the very end.

So, the doctrine of faith in Christ, repentance, making and renewing and keeping covenants, and being directed by the Spirit will become a pattern of living. Our actions in daily life are shaped and governed by these doctrinal principles.

### **The Gospel of Jesus Christ Is the Bridge Between Premortal Life and Eternal Life**

I know some of you returned missionaries are saying to yourselves, Elder Ballard is quoting some of this doctrine from the inspired *Preach My Gospel*. I hope you recognize some of these words and that you have internalized their meaning in your lives. Those of you young men and young women who have not served missions, may I suggest that it would be well for you to have a copy of *Preach My Gospel*. Study chapter three, the lesson entitled “The Gospel of Jesus Christ.” It lays out very clearly and in more detail the basic steps necessary to avoid being caught by the artificial

lures of Satan and being dragged away from the pathway that leads to eternal life.

How simple the gospel of Jesus Christ is! How important it is for us to stay on the only pathway defined by God as the way back home to His eternal presence. The gospel is the plan of happiness; it is simple and beautiful.

Let me illustrate how the first principles of the gospel are like a bridge between premortal life (represented by my raised left hand) and eternal life (represented by my raised right hand). The bridge between the two is the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have come from the premortal world into mortality to strive to know and to live the principles of the gospel. We find ourselves now here on earth, making our way back, hopefully, to the presence of God. This requires understanding and obedience. Our goal as we strive to live the gospel is to become candidates to receive all of the blessings our Father has in store for His faithful and worthy children.

Jesus said:

*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. [3 Nephi 27:20–21]*

### **You Have a Great Future to Look Forward To**

I come back and ask you again to think of your own life. How are you doing? Is there anything in your life causing you to drift from the teachings of the gospel into the influence of Satan? Are you giving the Lord equal time? You live in a world filled with technology, where there is such easy access to electronic information, entertainment, and social networks on your home computer, your iPad, or your iPhone. No generation before you has had so much technology available at their

fingertips. Through Facebook and other social networks you can stay in touch with friends all over the world. While these are marvelous tools, I caution you not to let the use of technology capture your time to the point that you become addicted to constantly using them. Somehow you need to limit their use so they do not steal away from you what is essential, precious, and eternal.

We need only watch the nightly news and read the newspapers to realize that the world is in enormous distress. There are earthquakes, hurricanes, and tornadoes in diverse places. There are wars and rumors of wars. There is famine and suffering and genocide, not to mention murders and other acts of violence.

Some of you may think that in today's world the future doesn't hold much to strive toward. I can remember as a young 13-year-old boy coming home from priesthood meeting on Sunday, December 7, 1941, to learn from my parents that Japan had just bombed Pearl Harbor. This propelled the United States into a world war that had already been raging in Europe for two years. It seemed like life as we knew it was going to come to an end. There was much uncertainty as many young men were swept up into military service. However, now, just as then, amidst all of the conflicts, struggles, and evil influences in the world, there is still much good.

When I was born—a long time ago, when all of you were still in the spirit world—there were only about 20 countries in the whole world that one could plausibly call democracies, where citizens enjoyed even a fraction of the freedoms we take for granted. Now there are more than 90. This means more of the world's people can live their lives in freedom and according to their own beliefs.

Today, worldwide, poverty is on the decline and health strides have been extraordinary, especially pertaining to sanitation and improved drinking water in developing countries. It's remarkable what's happening.

Educational opportunities are also becoming more widely available.

There are many reasons for you to be filled with hope and optimism. Don't let Satan influence you and cause you to not believe in the great future you have to look forward to.

### **You Are the Future Church Leaders**

We all prepare to enjoy life by the daily decisions we make. If you are true and faithful to the doctrine and gospel of Christ, many wonderful opportunities in life will be yours. In the Church, your leaders at the ward, stake, and general levels will be inspired to call you to serve in those callings that you have prepared yourself for as a result of your wise choices to keep the commandments of God.

Thirty years from now the leadership of the Church will largely depend on how well each one of you is prepared to fulfill the calls to serve in the Church that will come to you.

Think about this—it took the Church 98 years, from 1830 to 1928 (the year I was born), to organize its first 100 stakes. The second 100 stakes were organized during the next 24 years. Then we start to see a very interesting picture unfold. At the end of 1960, just eight years later, the 300th stake was organized in Toronto, Canada, during the time that President Thomas S. Monson was the mission president there. Two weeks ago Sister Ballard and I attended stake conference in the Toronto Ontario Stake, which was celebrating its jubilee, or 50th year.

In 1964, just four years after the creation of the 300th stake, the 400th stake was organized. Two hundred more stakes were organized during the next nine years, and the 900th stake was organized in March of 1978. Soon, the 3,000th stake will be organized.

How does this relate to you young men and young women? Suppose the Church creates 100 stakes a year. That means by 2040, just 30 years from now, the number of stakes will have doubled to approximately 6,000. You will be in your late 40s or early 50s.

Now ask yourself—where are the 6,000 stake presidents? Where are their first counselors, second counselors, executive secretaries, clerks? Where are the 6,000 times 12, or 72,000, high councilors? And suppose that every stake has an average of 10 units—about the average in the stakes today—where are the 60,000 bishops, first counselors, second counselors, executive secretaries, clerks, elders quorum presidents and their counselors, high priests group leaders and their assistants, Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary presidents and counselors, and on and on? Where are they? I am speaking to them right now. *You are they!* Will you be ready to accept the callings that the Lord will extend to you?

#### **There Is an Eternal Plan for You**

Heavenly Father has an eternal plan for each one of you. Your birthright, the privilege you have of being a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is like unto a miracle in a world of some six billion people. You made some very important promises and commitments to Heavenly Father while living with Him in the premortal world.

You may wonder how the names of auxiliary leaders, bishops, stake presidents, and General Authorities come to the minds of those who have the responsibility for extending calls to serve. How does a stake president know who the bishop should be? How does a General Authority know who the stake president should be? (Just today I laid my hands on the head of a brand-new stake president to set him apart. We reorganized the stake over the weekend. What a privilege that is—what an awesome responsibility!) How does the president of the Church know who a General Authority should be? It is by *revelation* that names are made known of those who have proven they are faithful and trustworthy and living the basic doctrines of Christ's gospel.

Do not let one day go by when you do not strive to be ready to serve. Remember, mortal-

ity is the time for all of us to prepare to meet God. In fact, Amulek taught:

*For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.*

*And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed. [Alma 34:32–33]*

Every day of your life the Lord will help you if you trust in Him and keep His commandments. The Lord makes it known to the responsible leader that you are ready to serve because you have stayed on the gospel path, you have lived up to the commitments you made before you were born, and the gospel of Jesus Christ guides your daily life.

May I suggest you begin now accepting callings. They will prepare you for future callings to serve in the Church.

Do what is necessary to build a real relationship with your Heavenly Father. You are His spiritual sons and daughters. Your divine parents love you with all Their hearts, as does the Lord Jesus Christ. They want you to follow the great plan of happiness that will lead you safely back home to Their presence.

#### **Stay Anchored to the Gospel of Jesus Christ**

As we come to the close of this meeting together, I pray that each of you will strive always to stay anchored to the doctrinal principles and ordinances of the gospel. Always give the Lord equal time so your testimonies will not drift to the false teachings of the world. Listen to the Brethren. We are doing everything we know to teach you the truth and encourage you to be anchored to those things that will keep you safe and free. Do the right things

every day for the right reasons, and you will be just fine.

Prepare in every way to be ready when the Lord needs your service to His Church. As you get out into the world, you will continue to be tested. That is one of the purposes of life. We have been sent here to determine just how committed and dedicated we really are. It is exciting to believe that we can rise up and be great in following the commandments and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I like this poem; it applies to all of us. It is entitled “The Oak Tree” by Johnny Ray Ryder Jr.

*A mighty wind blew night and day,  
It stole the oak tree's leaves away,  
Then snapped its boughs and pulled its bark  
Until the oak was tired and stark.  
But still the oak tree held its ground  
While other trees fell all around.  
The weary wind gave up and spoke,  
“How can you still be standing, Oak?”  
The oak tree said, “I know that you  
Can break each branch of mine in two,  
Carry every leaf away,  
Shake my limbs, and make me sway.  
But I have roots stretched in the earth,  
Growing stronger since my birth.  
You'll never touch them, for you see,  
They are the deepest part of me.  
Until today, I wasn't sure  
Of just how much I could endure.  
But now I've found, with thanks to you,  
I'm stronger than I ever knew.”*

My beloved young brothers and sisters, be like the strong oak tree. Come to know how strong you are. Push your faith and trust in God and Christ down deep in gospel soil. Always be aware of the artificial flies being presented to us by the counterfeit fisher of men, Lucifer. May we have the wisdom and spiritual insight to discern and refuse his many dangerous offerings. Live the doctrine

of Christ, the simple and basic principles of the gospel, each day—have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repent, honor the covenant of baptism, live worthy of the Holy Ghost as your companion, and endure to the very end. Do this every day, and the Spirit of the Lord will be with you to keep you safely on the pathway that leads to eternal life.

### Testimony

I bear my witness and testimony to you. I want you to know we love you. You will carry off on your shoulders the future of this Church. You have a great destiny. I pray with all of my heart that you'll do those things tonight that you need to do if you need to make some course corrections in the way you're living. And I bear my witness and testimony to you that Jesus is the Christ. He does live. This is His Church. We are on His errand. We are His covenant people. I know that. I bear that witness and pray now for the Lord to bless you. I invoke that blessing upon you in His holy name—that you may find peace, joy, and calm assurance in your own heart that you are doing the very best you can to be worthy of His holy name. May this be your blessing now and through all the days of your life is my humble prayer, testimony, and blessing in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

### Notes

1. Personal letter, dated October 10, 2010. Used by permission.
2. M. Russell Ballard, “O That Cunning Plan of the Evil One,” *Ensign*, November 2010, 108.
3. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 61–62.
4. *Preach My Gospel*, 62.
5. *Preach My Gospel*, 63.
6. *Preach My Gospel*, 64.
7. *Preach My Gospel*, 65.
8. *Preach My Gospel*, 66.