

DOCTRINE & COVENANTS & CHURCH HISTORY GOSPEL DOCTRINE CLASS

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Next Week

Green Mountain
1st Ward
Conference

Lesson 7: “The First Principles and Ordinances of the Gospel”

Introduction

Every journey begins somewhere, with a step, a thought, a desire, a commitment. For mortals the journey back into the presence of God begins with four first steps—we call them the first principles and ordinances. There are others to follow. How many? We have no idea. **Joseph Smith** said:

“When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the Gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave.”

(Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Six 1843–44, p.348)

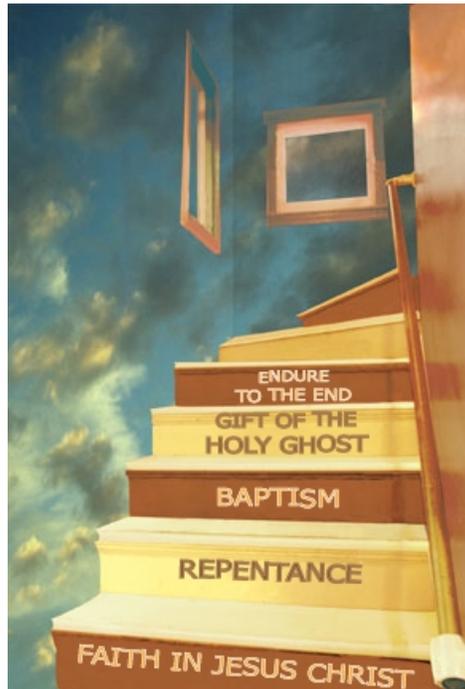
This lesson discusses the first principles and ordinances of the gospel. Through faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, we are better able to see our eternal path and purpose while in mortality.

The Lord restored the gospel through the Prophet Joseph Smith “*line upon line, precept upon precept*” (D&C 128:21). Some of the first truths to be restored were the first principles and ordinances of the gospel.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the first principle of the gospel.

The restoration of the gospel began with an act of faith on the part of Joseph Smith (Joseph Smith—History 1:11–14). The appearance of Moroni also occurred in response to an act of faith by Joseph, who recorded that he had “*full confidence in obtaining a divine manifestation*” as he prayed for forgiveness (Joseph Smith—History 1:29).

D&C 19:23; 88:118; Alma 32:27. We must nurture our faith in Christ by engaging in those activities that will strengthen that faith. We must make opportunities to partake of the fruits of the gospel. We must pray and study and read and bless and attend.



As the Spirit brushes against day by day and week by week, we will discover that our faith cannot be shaken.

D&C 20:69; James 2:14–17. We can demonstrate our faith in Christ as indicated in these scriptures. Faith in Jesus Christ affects our desire to do good works.

D&C 8:10; 35:9; 42:48–51; 63:9–11 (See also Moroni 7:33) teach us what we can accomplish with faith and what cannot be done without faith.

The D&C stresses the importance of praying with faith. **D&C 10:46–52** indicates that the ancient prophets had “*faith in their prayers*” that the Book of Mormon would be preserved.

Lesson Highlights

- Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the first principle of the gospel.
- Through sincere repentance, we can partake of the blessings of the Atonement.
- Baptism is an essential ordinance.
- Through the ordinance of confirmation, we receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.
- We must endure to the end in faith to receive eternal life.

A study of this lesson will help help us understand and seek the blessings that come from the first principles and ordinances of the gospel: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, and confirmation.



Through sincere repentance, we can partake of the blessings of the Atonement.

Repentance is a major theme in the Doctrine and Covenants. The Lord teaches the doctrine of repentance and repeatedly emphasizes the need to repent. He promises great blessings to those who repent—and punishments for those who do not.

D&C 58:42–43. Repentance is the process of becoming cleansed from our sins and receiving forgiveness for them through the power of the Savior’s Atonement. To repent, we must confess and forsake our sins and turn away from evil. We must also turn our heart and will to God, sincerely striving to obey His commandments.

President Ezra Taft Benson explained: *“Repentance means more than simply a reformation of behavior. ... True repentance is based on and flows from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other way. True repentance involves a change of heart and not just a change of behavior (see Alma 5:13)”* (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* [1988], 71).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught that *“repentance requires both turning away from evil and turning to God”* (in Conference Report, Oct. 1991, 40; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 30).

D&C 18:11–13 and **D&C 19:16–19** teach about the Savior’s love for us. When we sin, we become unclean and subject to the punishments required by the law of justice.

Baptism is an essential ordinance.

Faith and repentance lead to baptism, the first ordinance of the gospel. In the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord revealed the purposes, qualifications, and instructions for baptism. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, John the Baptist restored the priesthood authority that is necessary to perform this ordinance.

D&C 18:22; 49:13–14. Purposes of baptism include commitment to the Savior, remission of sins, membership in the Church, opening the door to the path of exaltation, and preparing to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Being imperfect, we cannot become clean again or meet the demands of justice on our own. By atoning for our sins, the Savior took upon Himself the punishments required by the law of justice and is able to offer the mercy and forgiveness we need to become clean. These blessings of the Atonement are available to us only on the condition that we repent (Alma 7:14).

Consequences of Not Repenting

D&C 1:33, 19:17–18, and D&C 29:17. The light that the unrepentant has received will be taken away. The wicked must suffer as the Lord did and the Lord will take vengeance upon them. Other consequences could include estrangement from God and others, guilt, low feelings of self-worth, rationalizing other sins, and being unforgiving.

Barriers to repentance include procrastination, pride, discouragement, and complacency. (“I’ll do it later when I’m not so busy, but even then it probably won’t help, and frankly, I don’t much care.”)

Blessings of True Repentance

D&C 1:32, 58:42, and D&C 109:53. The Lord will forgive the truly obedient and repentant. The Lord will forget the transgression and be merciful and gracious.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught: *“Repentance is a rescuing, not a dour doctrine. It is available to the gross sinner as well as to the already good individual striving for incremental improvement”* (in Conference Report, Oct. 1991, 40; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 30).

Even though repentance can be a difficult process, it can also bring great joy as we turn our hearts from sin to God.

D&C 20:37 teaches about the qualifications required for baptism: humility, desire, broken heart and contrite spirit, witness of true repentance, willingness to take upon them the name of Christ, determination to serve God to the very end, and good works that indicate the receipt of the Spirit of Christ unto the remission of sins.

D&C 76:51; John 3:3–5; Romans 6:3–4 teach that baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as the burial of our old self and our rebirth in Christ. Additionally, it symbolizes being cleansed from sin.

Elder Henry B. Eyring:

“The test a loving God has set before us is not to see if we can endure difficulty. It is to see if we can endure it well. We pass the test by showing that we remembered Him and the commandments He gave us. And to endure well is to keep those commandments whatever the opposition, whatever the temptation, and whatever the tumult around us. We have that clear understanding because the restored gospel makes the plan of happiness so plain.”

“In the Strength of the Lord,”
Ensign, May 2004, 16)



Through the ordinance of confirmation, we receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

D&C 130:22. The Holy Ghost is a member of the Godhead and a “personage of Spirit”.

D&C 33:15; 35:5–6. After baptism by water, Church members receive the gift of the Holy Ghost through the ordinance of confirmation.

D&C 20:41. This ordinance is also called the “baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost”.

The **Prophet Joseph Smith** said, “Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without ... the baptism of the Holy Ghost” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 314).

Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught: “Manifestations of the Holy Ghost are given to lead sincere seekers to gospel truths that will persuade them to repentance and baptism. The gift of the Holy Ghost is more comprehensive. ... [It] includes the right to constant companionship, that we may ‘always have his Spirit to be with [us]’ (D&C 20:77)” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 80; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 60).

Elder Bruce R. McConkie compared the manifestations of the Holy Ghost that a person can receive before baptism to flashes of lightning that “[blaze] forth in a dark and stormy night.” He compared the gift of the Holy Ghost that a person receives after baptism to “the continuing blaze of the sun at noonday, shedding its rays on the path of life and on all that surrounds it” (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* [1985], 262).

We must endure to the end in faith to receive eternal life.

2 Nephi 31:19–20 and **D&C 14:7.** When we are baptized, we enter the path that leads to exaltation. However, this single experience does not ensure that we will be exalted. As the Lord frequently admonishes in the Doctrine and Covenants, we must also keep the covenants we made at baptism to endure faithfully to the end of our lives.

Conclusion

Nephi calls these first principles and ordinances the Doctrine of Christ (see 2 Nep. 31:2; 31:21; 32:6). How clearly they mark the path and point the way back to our heavenly home. Through faith, repentance and baptism and having received the gift of the Holy Ghost our journey has just begun. We must endeavor to live worthy of the manifestations of the Holy Ghost and to endure in obedience to those promptings.

Receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost does not automatically ensure that the Holy Ghost will always be with us. **President Joseph Fielding Smith** said, “*The Holy Ghost will not dwell with that person who is unwilling to obey and keep the commandments of God or who violates those commandments willfully*” (*Church News*, 4 Nov. 1961, 14).

Functions of the Holy Ghost include:

- **D&C 18:18; 39:6; 42:14; 75:10.** He is a teacher
- **D&C 39:6.** He is the Comforter
- **D&C 42:17; 100:8.** He is a testifier
- **D&C 11:12.** He leads us to do good, walk humbly, and judge righteously
- **D&C 11:13; 76:10.** He enlightens our minds and fills our souls with joy
- **D&C 84:33.** Through Him we are sanctified
- **D&C 31:11; 75:27; 84:85.** He inspires us where to go and what to do and say.

It is a great privilege for us to have the companionship of one of the members of the Godhead. Ponder how you can enjoy these blessings more fully in your life.

Gospel Doctrine Notebook

Record your thoughts on the teachings discussed in this lesson.

- What is the basis of your faith in Jesus Christ?
- How has faith helped you overcome discouragement, weaknesses, or other difficulties?
- How have you seen the power of faith manifested?

