

Doctrine & Covenants Lesson 5 Notes: The Restored Church

*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock,
over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers,
to feed the church of God,
which He hath purchased with his own blood.*

Acts 20:21

What a marvelous privilege to belong to Christ's true church! The LDS church begins with the story of Joseph Smith, a farm boy who ended his life as a martyred prophet—a young man whose life was interrupted by a vision and a mission direct from God to reestablish the Church of Jesus Christ on the earth in the latter-days. Never has the expectation of an answer to simple prayer been so unexpectedly and spectacularly exceeded.

We are the inheritors of Joseph's mission. And Brigham's and Oliver's and Wilford's and Clarissa's and Eliza's and all the pioneers who held tight to the iron rod and made it through the mists of darkness that the adversary quickly spread about to obscure the truth. From the very beginning this church has had enemies. We might say it has had enemies "from before the foundation of the world," just as it has had supporters and sponsors. Today a veritable industry exists of anti-Mormon books, movies, websites, organizations, etc. Let's take it as a compliment!

Now, in the 21st century, we want to know what it means to be a member of Christ's "true" church. The 20th century was a time of growth and public acceptance for the Mormons. Will this continue or will our stand on the family mean, as for the pioneers of the 19th century, stiff opposition? The Mormon pioneers finally found peace by trekking to the Rocky Mountains, beyond the reach of their enemies. There they could live and grow in safety. And multiply. Multiplying really was the task at hand in the early days. Practicing polygamy by God's command, they accomplished what the Book of Mormon *said* polygamy would accomplish: they "raised up seed unto the Lord." (Jacob 2:30) The church achieved a critical mass of members, hidden from view during the blast of the civil war that was engulfing the rest of the United States. We grew steadily in number until we had enough of a missionary force to take up the work of carrying the message across the face of the earth.

Eventually the rest of the country took notice of this strange sect in the Wild West. They were outraged by our strange ways and slowly but surely stamped out the practice of polygamy as the price to be paid for being allowed to live unmolested. But it didn't matter. We had achieved the goal. We were now big enough to make a difference in the world. And we did. We grew and grew and grew, sending missionaries to Europe, the Pacific Islands, Asia and South America. It took 117 years for church membership to reach one million. The church is now approximately 13 million strong and adds a million members about every three and a half years.

At a priesthood meeting in Kirtland, Ohio, on April 26th, 1834 the Prophet Joseph Smith invited those present to bear testimony of the latter-day work, and several did. Joseph then said, "Brethren, I have been very much edified and instructed in your testimonies here tonight, but I want to say to you before the Lord that you know no more concerning the destinies of this church and kingdom than a babe upon its mothers lap. You don't comprehend it. It is only a little handful of the Priesthood you see here tonight, but this church will fill North and South America--It will fill the world." (Conf. report April 1898)

As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we feel a sense of pride in this mission to proclaim Christ's true gospel to the whole world. We go on missions and send our young people to the farthest corners of the world. The gospel is now like a fishing net, seeking to gather in all that we can before the great harvest at the end of the world, when God will separate the wheat from the chaff (or should we say the sardines from the mackerel). But it is worth remembering that for much of the history of the world, God did not have a church at all. He had a family—the house of Israel.¹ He worked through a certain lineage. You could not, from Abraham's day on, "join the church." To be God's people, you had to be born into one of twelve tribes. These chosen people "incubated" if you will, the truth about God for hundred's of years, until the time that it would once again be preached to all the earth.

ADOPTION INTO THE TRUE CHURCH

The idea that "outsiders" or *Gentiles* could be the people of God, was enough to make the citizens of Nazareth try to throw Jesus off a cliff. It was unthinkable to the Jews. Much of the story of the growth of the early Christian church that we read of in Acts is the story of the rejection of Jesus' ministry by the Jews and the ultimate

¹ Note the Pearl of Great Price makes it clear that before the flood, the gospel of Jesus Christ was preached, along with baptism and the receiving of the Holy Ghost, to all who would listen. Not many did, but those who believed joined with the City of Enoch, a Zion people who were eventually taken up to heaven before the earth was cleansed by flood. After the flood, God established a believing lineage in Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, through which to take His message to the world.

acceptance of it by the Gentiles. This resulted in a passing of the torch to a new group of people, the Christian church made up mostly of Gentile believers. Many of the writings of our New Testament consist of the letters of the apostle Paul, whose life work it was to teach that the Gospel of Jesus Christ really *was* Good News! Christ was a Savior for *all* of mankind, not just the Jews or the Israelites. His mission was to atone for the sins of all the earth, and His church was the body of believers taken out from their former bloodlines, and reborn into the family of God, a family that discriminated against no one! As the Book of Mormon so forcefully put it, “Black and white, bond and free, male and female...all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile. (2 Nephi 26:33)”

To his new audience of Gentiles Paul preached the doctrine of adoption as sons and daughters of God. They understood this concept well. Augustus Caesar, the emperor when Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem at the time of Christ's birth, had been born into rural poverty, a grandnephew of Julius Caesar. Julius had met the boy Octavian on a military campaign to the north of Italy and had liked what he saw. To Rome's great amazement, when Caesar was murdered and his will was read to the people, everyone heard for the first time that Octavian had been named as his heir. Octavian's family urged him to renounce this honor because it would mark him for assassination in the power struggles surely to follow. But the boy Octavian had ambition and began to call himself Caesar, son of Caesar.

It worked. Julius Caesar's troops began to flock to the boy. Over time his power grew until he defeated Mark Anthony for control of the whole Roman Empire. How was he able to pull off such a bold strategy? Because adoption in the Roman and Greek world was so powerful a concept. It meant that the adopted child was just as if he had been born a legitimate child to the adopting father. He received every honor, every sense of history, every bit of the inheritance and even all the dignity of his new name.² Thus Paul says to the Gentile believers in Galatia, “There is neither Jew nor Greek... for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise...God sent forth his Son...to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, than an heir of God through Christ.”(Galatians 3:28-29; 4:4-7)

Our idea of what a church is today has its genealogy in Acts and the letters of Paul. The Mormon missionaries gather into the LDS church men and women from every kindred, tongue and people of the whole earth. None of them enter the church by claiming it as a birthright. Even a Jew, if he were to desire entrance into the kingdom of God today, would do so like everybody else—by baptism and the reception of the Holy Ghost. And why have these ordinances become the gateway into the church and kingdom of God in the latter days? Because, as the Lord stated in D&C 22:1, “Behold, I say unto you that all old covenants have I caused to be done away in this thing; and this is a new and an everlasting covenant.” The Old Covenant, typified by the Mosaic Law, was based on obedience to the laws of God and came by birthright through the House of Israel—God's chosen people. But the New and Everlasting Covenant, or the fullness of the gospel,³ is made available to all people equally through the atonement of Jesus Christ.⁴ By covenanting with Christ through baptism, we take his name upon us, literally becoming part of his covenant family.⁵ Baptism symbolizes being reborn or “born again” into this family of Christ (the Church) when we are converted to Him as Savior. (For some of us that was not the same thing. Baptized at 8 years of age as a tradition of our parents, we may not have been personally converted to Christ until later, making that ordinance then come alive with power in our lives.)

The ordinances are very important for several reasons. They are covenant promises. Through them the person desiring to join the church repents of past sins and makes solemn promises to Jesus Christ. In return he will receive membership in Christ's church and all its blessings. The new convert now lives his life by these promises and renews them each week as he takes the sacrament. The covenants are to: 1. Take upon us the name of Jesus Christ, 2. Always remember Him, and 3. Keep his commandments.

But it is not the ordinances that save us. Neither is it a church that saves us. It is Jesus Christ that saves us. Yet there *is* a true church and there *are* valid priesthood ordinances. Why? Why not just “ask Jesus into your heart,” confessing him as Savior and asking for His forgiveness. We do not wish to denigrate such a decision in any way. People who make these personal commitments to Jesus Christ as their Savior have made very real and binding pledges that creates obligations in their lives to stay true and endure in living out their decision. But Christ's church is his body on the earth, as Paul taught. The church is a specific organization because it has a work to do! It is not enough for there to be believers in Christ scattered about the earth, finding personal fulfillment in their Savior. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a mission. Several missions actually. We are building temples, doing genealogy, perfecting the saints, preaching the true gospel and administering sealing covenants, building stakes of

² See Vignette: “We Who Owe Everything to a Name”

³ D&C 66:2, D&C 133:57

⁴ Do you wonder why the rules change halfway through the game? They really don't, but God chose a certain people to be a kind of “greenhouse” for the truth: to provide a lineage for His Son and develop a people who would represent His name, Jehovah, to all the earth.

⁵ Mosiah 5:7, D&C 35:1-2, Moroni 7:19

Zion as refuges from the world's wickedness, and generally preaching a voice of preparation and *warning*. All of this is because of the imminent Second Coming of the Lord to the earth. If we were not doing these things, the "whole earth would be wasted at this coming." (D&C 2:3) Eventually it will also be the church's task to build the city of Zion, the New Jerusalem, the ultimate refuge from the coming storm of judgment.

We can agree that being a Mormon generally means being very busily engaged in these good causes. No one ever accused us of being slackers. But as we have noted, it is not belonging to the church that saves us. The church *is the saved*. Even the ordinances themselves cannot save us; but the ordinances can channel the flow of power from Christ into the repentant person. The priesthood administers the ordinances that channel this power. But the power is in Christ himself. All that we do in the church is, or should be, aimed at bringing people to Christ so that they can relate to him, believe in him, trust in him, feast on his words, seek him, and finally *know* him. As the Lord spoke to Alma, "For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them; and it is I that granteth unto him that believeth unto the end a place at my right hand. For behold, in my name are they called; and *if they know me* they shall come forth, and shall have a place eternally at my right hand." (Mosiah 26:23-24)

That is why the covenant we make at conversion is an adoption process. It reflects a new identity. When we take upon us this new relationship so thoroughly that we are essentially born anew into the family of Christ, we take his name. Like Octavian, who became Caesar, we leave behind an old identity and become thoroughly identified with a new father and a new family. King Benjamin calls us "sons and daughters of Christ." (Mosiah 5:7) D&C 25:1 says, "Verily I say unto you, all those who receive my gospel are sons and daughters in my kingdom." D&C 34 begins, "*My son* Orson, hearken and hear and behold what I, the Lord God, shall say unto you, even Jesus Christ your Redeemer..." It is popular these days to hear the youth refer to Jesus as their "elder brother" or "older brother." You will notice that the Lord did not address Orson Pratt as "my little brother Orson."

TAKING A NAME

Because of the covenant of baptism, the name of Christ becomes very important. We are baptized in that name. Every week we covenant to take upon ourselves that name and always remember that name. We read in the scriptures that we are to do *all that we do* "in the name of Jesus Christ." (Mormon 9:29 & D&C 46:31) This name must be very powerful, for we are assured that "whoso believeth in Christ, doubting nothing, whatsoever he shall ask the Father *in the name of Christ* it shall be granted him." (Mormon 9:21) It is a fact that many of us realize that taking this name is a thing of great, even the greatest significance, but we are not exactly sure what it means...at least in what we call our "daily lives."

It is helpful to compare it with different ways one person can "take the name" of another person in the regular world. At birth we receive our parents' family name. We are often told to honor that name and be proud of it and do nothing that would tarnish it. We inherit with the family name the history and accomplishments of our forbears as well as their genetic makeup. In like manner, we are "born again" into the family of Christ and receive his name. As we read in Alma, "And those who did belong to the church were faithful; yea, all those who were true believers in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ, or Christians as they were called, because of their belief in Christ who should come." (Alma 46:15) People who know our last name identify us with a certain family. People who know we are Christian will identify us in their minds with Christ. We should live in a way that brings honor to that name and admiration for His work. It is a daunting thought, but nevertheless true, that if we claim to be Christian, people will judge the Son of God by what they think of our actions.

Another way we can take someone's name is through the marriage covenant. When a woman takes the name of her husband, it signifies her desire to be one with him in a new family. She is willing to identify with him in the closest possible way. They have been two separate people from two separate families. Now they have the same name. They are one. Christ himself refers to the church as his "bride." Used this way, the reference is always to the righteous, to Zion. D&C 109 says, "That thy church may come forth out of the wilderness of darkness, and shine forth fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners...And be adorned as a bride for that day when thou shalt unveil the heavens." No relationship is closer than this one and God wants us to know that his desire is that we be one with him as he is one with the Father.

D&C 35:2 expresses this: "I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was crucified for the sins of the world, even as many as will believe on my name, that they may become the sons of God, *even one in me as I am one in the Father, as the Father is one in me, that we may be one.*" When Christ walked the earth he often expressed the oneness he had with the Father by saying that the Father was *in him* and he was *in the Father*. For example in John we read, "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." (John 14:10-11)

How can one man live in another? The John 14 scripture contains its own clues to understanding this. He says his Father's words dwell in him and those are the words he speaks. He says that the things he does, his 'works', are the works the Father would have him do. Indeed, he seems to have completely subsumed his own will to the will of his Father, doing and saying only those things that the Father would have him do. Later in the same chapter, Christ extends the invitation to us to enter into the same kind of relationship with him: "And I will pray the Father,

and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." (John 14:16-20) That is also why Paul could pray for the early saints, "That He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." (Ephesians 3:16-17)

RECEIVING LIFE FROM THE SON

Jesus showed us by example what it was to live your life filled with the spirit of another person greater and more powerful than yourself, who would give you all that you needed and guide you in all things so that you would become the "revelation" of that (invisible) person to the world around you. Then Jesus invites us into that same relationship with himself. He says that he will send his spirit to "abide with [us] forever" and because that spirit is in us, we can do and say the things that represent and reveal our covenant Father⁶, Jesus Christ, to a wicked world that doesn't know who He is. When we lose the spirit through our sin and weakness, we can repent and re-establish the relationship so that the spirit is once more abiding within us, giving us that oneness with Christ that is the hallmark of a true Christian. D&C 50:43 sums it up nicely: "And the Father and I are one. I am in the Father and the Father in me; and inasmuch as ye have received me, ye are in me and I in you." We are invited to receive the spirit of the Holy Ghost so that we may have the same close relationship with the Savior that he had with his Father.

Names are often simply identifiers. But names in the scriptures are much more than that. They represent the power, function and character of a person. We must not use the name of the Lord "in vain" as it says in the third commandment. We cringe when we hear someone use that precious name as a swear word, or even as a simple exclamation point. In many Jewish writings you will see this: "G*d." They feel His name is too sacred to write or even pronounce. Latter-day saints usually avoid the more obvious ways in which a person takes the name of the Lord in vain. But there are other, less obvious ways.

My husband had a dear friend who taught the gospel doctrine class in his student ward and was an important influence in keeping many young Latter-day Saints on the straight and narrow and persuading them to go on missions. At my husband's request, he sent us many of his lessons and talks, which are now a precious resource. At the end of each one is this little coda: "ITNOJCA." It was, of course, shorthand for the fact that he would end his talk or lesson "in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen." Is it possible that our danger is not that we would use the Lord's name as a swear word or exasperated exclamation, but that we would just stick it on the end of whatever we do or say with little thought of what it really means. Do we share a recipe in a homemaking meeting and stick ITNOJCA on the end? Our use of his sacred name must never be flippant or thoughtless.

To live "in the name of Jesus Christ" is to live as Jesus lived in oneness with his own father. It is to be a reflection of Christ to the dark world, as a tiny mirror would reflect the light of the sun into a dark room. We should do this consciously, beginning each day with a humble and sincere prayer for that light to be in us and shine through us. Without consciously bringing that "life" that is in Christ into our own being through prayer and scripture study ("feasting upon the words of Christ." 2 Nephi 32:3), it will simply not happen that Christ can live in us and we in him. Even though Jesus Christ was the Son of God, he also showed us this pattern of praying to his father for extended periods of time, fasting, and learning, memorizing and using the words of scripture, to show us a template for bringing the life of God into *our* lives. And once it is "in us" it can be worked out of us in the things that we say and do, and the way that we treat the people around us. It is really not so mysterious. It is just sometimes more work than we are willing to do. We sometimes have competing gods in our life—of the kind that make us want to "walk in our own way" rather than live out the life of Christ.

Don't I know! I am lazy.⁷ If I ever sit down with the TV remote in my hand at the end of a long day I can become a mashed couch potato, sitting through American Idol (that name!) or three consecutive episodes of "What Not to Wear" like a zombie. God knows our weakness. The D&C is filled with the Savior's understanding words to his church. He calls them his "little flock" and says, "Behold, I do not condemn you; go your ways and sin no more; perform with soberness the work which I have commanded you. 36 Look unto me in every thought; doubt not, fear not. 37 Behold the wounds which pierced my side, and also the prints of the nails in my hands and feet; be faithful, keep my commandments, and ye shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. Amen." There are in fact, many places in the Doctrine and Covenants in which the Lord says essentially, 'your sins are forgiven you. Now go and

⁶ It may help keep things straight if you remember that the most basic meaning of *father* is *life-giver*. There cannot be life without a father. The most basic meaning of "son" is one who has received life from a father. We have a Father who gave life to our spirit bodies and a Father who gave us Eternal Life through His atoning sacrifice. They both live in Heaven. That means that Jesus Christ was sometimes acting in his role as son (like when he lived on earth), and sometimes in the role of Father. Just like everyone who is a father, he was a son first. First one *receives* life from a life-giver, and then one can become a life-giver themself. "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." (John 5:26) These are good things to ponder on.

⁷ We are not telling if it was Sallie or Lynda who wrote this paragraph!

sin no more.⁸ Like a good parent teaching his little children hard skills, he is patient with our mistakes as long as we are humble, faithful and repentant when we mess up. He will work with us. Thank heavens!

ANOTHER DEFINITION

Which brings us back around to the beginning. What does it mean to belong to Christ's church? There is a theory in mathematics called Set Theory. It is usually demonstrated by the intersection of two circles, A & B. Where the two circles intersect and overlap, there are things belonging to both A and B. Other disciplines, such as organizational behavior or psychology, make use of set theory to describe intersecting sets. For example, you can be in the Motherhood set, the Mormon set and the California set. That makes you a Californian Mormon Mom. Part of your set may be intersecting with another woman who lives in Louisiana and is also Mormon and a mother. You may find that many of the circles you inhabit intersect with your Presbyterian neighbor, who stays home with her children and lives in California. You are in many of the same sets, including a dog owner set and a mom of infants set, but you are not in the Presbyterian set and she is not in the Mormon set. You have much in common with her but probably not as much as with an active divorced sister in your ward who is your visiting teacher. If you and your Presbyterian neighbor are good friends, hopefully you'll recognize that you both inhabit the "Christian" set.

Tucked into the Doctrine and Covenants is a fascinating scriptural definition of the word "church" that seems to include other Christians who have made real commitments to Christ. It says: "Whosoever repenteth and cometh unto me, the same is my church." And then to make sure we don't miss the point or misunderstand, the Lord goes on to say, "Whosoever declareth more or less than this, the same is not of me, but is against me; therefore he is not of my church." (D&C 10:67-70) Though members of other churches are often not gracious enough to include us in the set they consider Christian, we should not be so small minded. Anyone who truly repents and comes to Christ has the heart of one of the Shepherd's sheep, for they hear his voice. There are many in the world like that who don't join the restored church because they 'know not where to find it.' (D&C 123:12)

We know already that one can be a member of the Mormon Church (one set) and yet not be a true disciple of Christ (a different set). You can be an inactive Mormon, a Mormon who is actively fighting against the church (like Alma the younger), or a discouraged Mormon just waiting to be invited back. Perhaps it is possible to be a member of Christ's church *using the definition found in D&C 10*, and yet be a Catholic or a man who found Christ through a prison ministry. The covenant of baptism into the Church then becomes like the covenant of marriage. The marriage *ceremony* does not create a relationship of love; but it seals it with a stamp of official authority. Many people are genuinely converted to Jesus Christ as their Savior, and when they discover the true church with its valid priesthood authority, they are able to put an official seal upon any feelings they already have in their hearts and go on to increase their understanding and enrich their relationship with their Savior.

Someone like Mother Teresa⁹ would be a member of this set, being one who served "having a determination to serve him to the end." (D&C 20:37) People like her are those who will be "established upon my rock" if they endure to the end in accordance with D&C 10:69. Whether in this life or beyond the veil seems not to matter much. Perhaps it works like this: Mother Teresa will be about her business in Paradise when an angel will tap her on the shoulder and say something like, "Teresa dear, they are about to do your work in the Los Angeles temple." "Well, bless my soul. I'll be right there!" And then the ordinance will seal what her heart has already done: choose a commitment of love and allegiance to Jesus Christ. We, as Latter-day Saint women, already belong to the true and living restored church of Jesus Christ. Let us be sure we also belong to the church as defined in D&C 10:62—those who "repent and come unto me."

⁸ D&C 61:2, D&C 84:61, D&C 75:8, D&C 109:34

⁹ And all those like her: William Tyndale, Joan of Arc, Martin Luther, persecuted Chinese Christians, and on and on.