

Teachings Concerning *The Doctrine of Faith*

What is Faith?

Joseph Smith

A. . . . faith is . . . the principle of action in all intelligent beings. (Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 1:9)

B. But faith is not only the principle of action, but of power also, in all intelligent beings, whether in heaven or on earth. (Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 1:13-14)

J. Reuben Clark, Jr.

As I think about faith, this principle of power, I am obliged to believe that it is an intelligent force. Of what kind I do not know. But it is superior to and overrules all other forces of which we know. It is the principle, the force, by which the dead are restored to life. (Conference Report, April 1960)

Bruce R. McConkie

But faith in its true signification is more than the moving cause pursuant to which men and angels act. It is also a principle of power. Faith is power. And where there is power, there is faith; and where there is no power, there is no faith. (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p.164)

Faith, As Exercised By God

Joseph Smith

A. But faith is not only the principle of action, but of power also, in all intelligent beings, whether in heaven or on earth. Thus says the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, 11:3 --

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God; so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

By this we understand that the principle of power which existed in the bosom of God, by which the

worlds were framed, was faith; and that it is by reason of this principle of power existing in the Deity, that all created things exist; so that all things in heaven, on earth, or under the earth exist by reason of faith as it existed in Him.

Had it not been for the principle of faith the worlds would never have been framed neither would man have been formed of the dust. It is the principle by which Jehovah works, and through which he exercises power over all temporal as well as eternal things. Take this principle or attribute -- for it is an attribute -- from the Deity, and he would cease to exist. (Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 1:13-16)

B. Faith, then, is the first great governing principle which has power, dominion, and authority over all things; by it they exist, by it they are upheld, by it they are changed, or by it they remain, agreeable to the will of God. Without it there is no power, and without power there could be no creation nor existence! (Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 1:24)

C. We here observe that God is the only supreme governor and independent being in whom all fullness and perfection dwell; who is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient; without beginning of days or end of life; and that in him every good gift and every good principle dwell; and that he is the Father of lights; in him the principle of faith dwells independently, and he is the object in whom the faith of all other rational and accountable beings center for life and salvation. (Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 2:2)

Bruce R. McConkie

God is God because faith dwells in him independently; and faith is power, the very power of God himself. (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p.163)

God the Father, in the ultimate and final sense, is the Creator of all things. He is the creator of spirit men, of mortal men, and of immortal men. He created life and death and immortality and eternal

life. He made the laws whereby spirit men gain mortality, and mortal men gain immortality, and faithful men gain eternal life. The power he uses in these and in all things is faith. Faith is power, and the power of God is the faith of God. (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p.168)

Faith, As Exercised By Man

Moroni 7:33

And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me.

Alma 32:21

And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.

J. Reuben Clark, Jr.

We have been given that Priesthood which carries in it this great power of faith. It has been given to us, you, me, and all who are listening in of the brethren holding the Priesthood. (Conference Report, April 1960)

Joseph Smith

A. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews, in the eleventh chapter of that epistle and first verse, gives the following definition of the word faith:

“Now faith is the substance (assurance) of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

From this we learn that faith is the assurance which men have of the existence of things which they have not seen, and the principle of action in all intelligent. (Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 1:7-9)

B. Let us here observe, that three things are necessary in order that any rational and intelligent being may exercise faith in God unto life and salvation.

First, the idea that he actually exists.

Secondly, a correct idea of his character, perfections, and attributes.

Thirdly, an actual knowledge that the course of life which he is pursuing is according to his will. For

without an acquaintance with these three important facts, the faith of every rational being must be imperfect and unproductive; but with this understanding it can become perfect and fruitful, abounding in righteousness, unto the praise and glory of God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 3:2-5)

Joseph B. Wirthlin

“The just shall live by faith”(Romans 1:7), we are told in holy writ. I ask again, What is faith?

Faith exists when absolute confidence in that which we cannot see combines with action that is in absolute conformity to the will of our Heavenly Father. Without all three--first, absolute confidence; second, action; and third, absolute conformity--without these three all we have is a counterfeit, a weak and watered-down faith. Let me discuss each of these three imperatives of faith.

First, we must have confidence in that which we cannot see. . . .

Second, for our faith to make a difference, we must act. We must do all that is in our power to change passive belief into active faith, for truly, “faith, if it hath not works, is dead” (James 2:17).

In 1998, President Gordon B. Hinckley raised a voice of warning to the Saints of this Church as well as to the world at large. He uttered that same warning last night at priesthood meeting. He said: “I am suggesting that the time has come to get our houses in order. So many people are living on the very edge of their incomes. In fact, some are living on borrowings. . . . I am troubled by the huge consumer installment debt which hangs over the people of the nation, including our own people” (“To the Boys and to the Men,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 53; *Liahona*, Jan. 1999, 65).

Brothers and sisters, when these prophetic words were uttered, some faithful members of the Church mustered their faith and heeded the counsel of the prophet. They are profoundly grateful today that they did. Others perhaps believed that what the prophet said was true but lacked faith, even as small as a grain of mustard seed. Consequently, some have suffered financial, personal, and family distress.

Third, one’s faith should be consistent with the will of our Heavenly Father, including His laws of nature. The sparrow flying into a hurricane may

believe that he can successfully navigate the storm, but the unforgiving natural law will convince him otherwise in the end.

Are we wiser than the sparrow? Often what passes for faith in this world is little more than gullibility. It is distressing to see how eager some people are to embrace fads and theories while rejecting or giving less credence and attention to the everlasting principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is distressing how eagerly some rush into foolish or unethical behavior, believing that God will somehow deliver them from the inevitable tragic consequences of their actions. They even go so far as to ask for the blessings of heaven, knowing in their hearts that what they do is contrary to the will of our Father in Heaven.

How do we know when our faith conforms to the will of our Heavenly Father and He approves of that which we seek? We must know the word of God. One of the reasons we immerse ourselves in the scriptures is to know of Heavenly Father's dealings with man from the beginning. If the desires of our heart are contrary to scripture, then we should not pursue them further.

Next, we must heed the counsel of latter-day prophets as they give inspired instruction.

Additionally, we must ponder and pray and seek the guidance of the Spirit. If we do so, the Lord has promised, "I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart" (D&C 8:2).

Only when our faith is aligned with the will of our Heavenly Father will we be empowered to receive the blessings we seek. ("Shall He Find Faith On the Earth," *Ensign*, Nov. 2002, pp. 82-84)

Dallin H. Oaks

My first point on the subject of timing is that the Lord has His own timetable. "My words are sure and shall not fail," the Lord taught the early elders of this dispensation. "But," He continued, "all things must come to pass in their time" (D&C 64:31--32).

The first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith means trust--trust in God's will, trust in His way of doing things, and trust in His timetable. We should not try to impose our timetable on His. . . . Indeed, we cannot have true faith in the Lord without also having complete trust in His will and in His timing. . . .

The Lord's timing also applies to the important

events of our personal lives. A great scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants declares that a particular spiritual experience will come to us "in his own time, and in his own way, and according to his own will" (D&C 88:68). This principle applies to revelation (see Oaks, "Teaching and Learning by the Spirit," *Ensign*, March 1997, 11) and to all of the most important events in our lives: birth, marriage, death, and even our moves from place to place. . . .

It is not enough that we are under call, or even that we are going in the right direction. The timing must be right, and if the time is not right, our actions should be adjusted to the Lord's timetable as revealed by His servants. . . .

Someone has said that life is what happens to us while we are making other plans. Because of things over which we have no control, we cannot plan and bring to pass everything we desire in our lives. Many important things will occur in our lives that we have not planned, and not all of them will be welcome. The tragic events of September 11th and their revolutionary consequences provide an obvious example. Even our most righteous desires may elude us, or come in different ways or at different times than we have sought to plan.

For example, we cannot be sure that we will marry as soon as we desire. A marriage that is timely in our view may be our blessing or it may not. . . .

The timing of marriage is perhaps the best example of an extremely important event in our lives that is almost impossible to plan. Like other important mortal events that depend on the agency of others or the will and timing of the Lord, marriage cannot be anticipated or planned with certainty. We can and should work for and pray for our righteous desires, but, despite this, many will remain single well beyond their desired time for marriage.

So what should be done in the meantime? Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ prepares us for whatever life brings. This kind of faith prepares us to deal with life's opportunities--to take advantage of those that are received and to persist through the disappointments of those that are lost. In the exercise of that faith we should commit ourselves to the priorities and standards we will follow on matters we do not control and persist faithfully in those commitments whatever happens to us because of the agency of others or the timing of the Lord. When we do this, we will have a constancy in our lives that will give us direction and peace. Whatever

the circumstances beyond our control, our commitments and standards can be constant. . . .

Wise are those who make this commitment: *I will put the Lord first in my life and I will keep His commandments.* The performance of that commitment is within everyone's control. We can fulfill that commitment without regard to what others decide to do, and that commitment will anchor us no matter what timing the Lord directs for the most important events in our lives.

Do you see the difference between committing to what *you will do*, in contrast to trying to plan that you will be married by the time you graduate or that you will earn at least X amount of dollars on your first job?

If we have faith in God and if we are committed to the fundamentals of keeping His commandments and putting Him first in our lives, we do not need to plan every single event--even every important event--and we should not feel rejected or depressed if some things--even some very important things--do not happen at the time we had planned or hoped or prayed.

Commit yourself to put the Lord first in your life, keep His commandments, and do what the Lord's servants ask you to do. Then your feet are on the pathway to eternal life. Then it does not matter whether you are called to be a bishop or a Relief Society president, whether you are married or single, or whether you die tomorrow. You do not know what will happen. Do your best on what is fundamental and personal and then trust in the Lord and His timing. (Dallin H. Oaks, "Timing," in *With Full Purpose of Heart: Messages by Dallin H. Oaks*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002, pp. 205-216).

Bruce R. McConkie

Queries: Which comes first faith or knowledge? Is faith a vague and uncertain hope in something unseen that, as a sprouting seed, may grow into knowledge? Or is faith based on truth and knowledge? Is faith something that grows out of and comes because of a prior knowledge of the truth?

Answers: Faith is the child of knowledge. It is reserved for those only who first have knowledge; there neither is nor can be any faith until there is knowledge. No one can have faith in a God of whom he knows nothing. Faith is founded on truth; it is the offspring of truth; it can never exist alone and apart from the truth. No one can have faith unto life and

salvation in a false god; no idol ever had power to raise the dead or stop the sun. And faith is power. It is true that faith in some doctrine or on some theological point may be imperfect; it is true that sproutings of either faith or knowledge can become perfect relative to that doctrine or concept. But faith itself -- the great and eternal power that creates and governs and saves, faith unto life and salvation -- saving faith grows out of knowledge and cannot come in any other way.

"Faith cometh by hearing," Paul says, "and hearing the word of God" taught by the power of the Holy Ghost. (Romans 10:17.) Faith comes to those only who receive the word of truth. Hence the gospel truism that "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (1 Corinthians 1:21.) The gospel embraces all truth, and truth -- nothing else -- can bring salvation. Thus Alma says, "If ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true." (Alma 32:21.) Indeed, faith is a hope in that which is not seen that is true, and there can be no faith in an unseen thing that is false. There is no power in falsehood. No one can have faith unto life and salvation in a god who is believed to be a spirit nothingness, or in a doctrine that denies the resurrection, or in a philosophy that postulates man's evolutionary evolvement from lower forms of life, or in anything that is not true.

Truth, diamond truth, is the rock foundation upon which faith rests, and no one can have faith in God or in any gospel truth unless and until he comes to a knowledge of whatever truth is involved. (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p.166-167)

How do men exercise faith? If they have an occasion to heal the sick, raise the dead or move mountains, how is it done? Faith is power, but what causes the power to flow forth and accomplish the desired result? As an introductory explanation, the account we are studying asks: "What are we to understand by a man's working by faith?"

By way of answer, the account says: "We understand that when a man works by faith he works by mental exertion instead of physical force. It is by words, instead of exerting his physical powers, with which every being works when he works by faith. God said, 'Let there be light: and there was light.' Joshua spake and the great lights which God had created stood still. Elijah commanded, and the

heavens were stayed for the space of three years and six months, so that it did not rain: he again commanded and the heavens gave forth rain. All this was done by faith. And the Saviour says: 'If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, say to this mountain, "Remove," and it will remove; or say to that sycamine tree, "Be ye plucked up, and planted in the midst of the sea," and it shall obey you.' Faith, then, works by words; and with these its mightiest works have been, and will be performed." (Lectures on Faith 7:3.)

But working by faith is not the mere speaking of a few well-chosen words; anyone with the power of speech could have commanded the rotting corpse of Lazarus to come forth, but only one whose power was greater than death could bring life again to the brother of Mary and Martha. Nor is working by faith merely a mental desire, however strong, that some eventuality should occur. There may be those whose mental powers and thought processes are greater than any of the saints, but only persons who are in tune with the Infinite can exercise the spiritual forces and powers that come from him.

Those who work by faith must first have faith; no one can use a power that he does not possess, and the faith or power must be gained by obedience to those laws upon which its receipt is predicated. These we have set forth. Those who work by faith must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and in his Father. They must accept at face value what the revealed word teaches as to the character, attributes, and perfections of the Father and the Son. They must then work the works of righteousness until they know within themselves that their way of life conforms to the divine will, and they must be willing to lay their all on the altar of the Almighty.

And then -- when the day is at hand and the hour has arrived for the miracle to be wrought -- then they must be in tune with the Holy Spirit of God. He who is the Author of faith, he whose power faith is, he whose works are the embodiment of justice and judgment and wisdom and all good things, even he must approve the use of his power in the case at hand. Faith cannot be exercised contrary to the order of heaven or contrary to the will and purposes of him whose power it is. Men work by faith when they are in tune with the Spirit and when what they seek to do by mental exertion and by the spoken word is the mind and will of the Lord. (Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, pp.191-192)

Marion G. Romney

It is also clear from the scriptures that one must pray in faith. It is apparent that there is a direct relationship between the strength of one's faith and the effectiveness of his prayer. There is, however, a principle associated with this matter of faith that we should all understand. I used to feel that if I could develop enough faith, I could receive in every instance exactly what I prayed for. This belief was based upon such scriptures as Matthew 17:20, in which Jesus said to his disciples, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." But at that time I had not learned that this promise was made upon the implied condition that one's request be made in harmony with the *will of God*.

We learned this principle in our home through a rather trying experience. During the early years of our married life, my wife and I intensely desired a particular blessing that we thought would be a great blessing, and we set about to obtain it by faith. We asked, we believed, we thought we had faith, but though we fasted often and prayed fervently, the years rolled by without bringing us the object of our prayers.

Finally we concluded that there must be something that we had not fully understood. Further research and prayerful study of the scriptures revealed the fact that we were not giving proper consideration to the will of the Lord, that we were concentrating our faith and prayers solely upon receiving the particular thing which by pre-determination we had set our hearts upon. We had to reconsider the conditions of the promise. We found that Jesus had stated them in full in several places. For example, to the Nephites he said, "... whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, *which is right*, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given you." (3 Nephi 18:20. Italics added.) In the light of this and other scriptures, we came to realize that pending the time we could know what is right and what is expedient, we had to learn to be as earnest in praying "if it be thy will" as we were in presenting our request.

We further learned that the time will come when we shall know the will of God before we ask, and then everything for which we pray will be right and expedient. And that will be when, as a result of

righteous living, we shall so enjoy the companionship of the Holy Spirit that he will dictate what we ask. On this point the Lord has said:

“And if ye are purified and cleansed from all sin, ye shall ask whatsoever you will in the name of Jesus and it shall be done.

“But know this, it shall be given you what you shall ask.” (D&C 50:29-30; also D&C 46:30 and Helaman 10:5.) (Marion G. Romney, *Improvement Era*, April, 1966, pp. 274-276, 301, 302, 304)

Godhood – Acquiring Independent Faith

Bruce R. McConkie

God the Father is an eternal being. The very name of the kind of life he lives is eternal life, and thus eternal life consists in living and being as he is. In other words, eternal life is to gain the power of God, which power is faith, and thus to be able to do what he does and to live as he lives. And the great and eternal plan of salvation that he has ordained and established consists of those laws, ordinances, and powers whereby faith is acquired and perfected until it is possessed in the same degree and to the same extent that it exists in Deity. Faith will thus dwell independently in every person who gains eternal life. (*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, p.169)