



BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL
<http://bookofmormoncentral.com/>



Religious Studies Center
<https://rsc.byu.edu/>

The Doctrine of Christ: 2 Nephi 31-32

Author(s): Larry E. Dahl

Source: *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, The Doctrinal Structure*

Editor(s): Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr.

Published: 1989

Page(s): 355-375



The Religious Studies Center is collaborating with Book of Mormon Central to preserve and extend access to scholarly research on the Book of Mormon. Items are archived by the permission of the Religious Studies Center.

<https://rsc.byu.edu/>

20

The Doctrine of Christ: 2 Nephi 31-32

Larry E. Dahl

*And now, behold, 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. And now, behold, **this is the doctrine of Christ**, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen (2 Nephi 31:21; emphasis added).*

Such is the testimony of Nephi, son of Lehi, a man called in his youth to be a prophet-leader among his people (1 Nephi 2:16, 22; 3:29), a man tutored by visions and angels (chapter 11), a man privileged to see the Savior (2 Nephi 11:2-3). He spoke with certitude. He knew. He knew Jesus Christ. He knew the doctrine of Christ. He knew it to be the only doctrine with the power to save. He felt compelled to conclude his earthly record and testimony with this doctrine.

Having an overview in our minds of what Nephi taught about the doctrine of Christ, and then discussing possible meanings and interrelationships of different elements of that doctrine, may help us gain important insights concerning “the

only and true doctrine” through which “man can be saved in the kingdom of God” (2 Nephi 31:21).

An Overview of the Doctrine of Christ

The doctrine of Christ as explained by Nephi in 2 Nephi includes the following elements:

1. Approaching the task “with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent” (31:13).
2. Seeking understanding, to be “brought into the light,” through prayer and effort (32:4, 8, 9).
3. “Repenting of your sins” (31:13).
4. Being “willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water” (31:13).
5. Receiving “the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost” (31:13).
6. Pressing “forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men [and] feasting upon the word of Christ” (31:20; 32:3).
7. Enduring “to the end” (31:20).
8. Receiving the promise of eternal life (31:20).

Full Purpose of Heart/Real Intent

James tells us that a wavering, double-minded approach is not the way to spiritual life. “For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord” (James 1:7). The message of the scriptures is clear—to tap spiritual sources requires “a sincere heart,” “real intent” (Moroni 10:4), “full purpose of heart,” no “hypocrisy” or “deception” (2 Nephi 31:13), and an “honest heart” (D&C 8:1). A powerful example of such full purpose and real intent is that of the Lamanite King, the father of Lamoni, who was taught the gospel by Aaron. When the king learned that there is a God who created this earth, that there was a fall, that there is a plan of redemption through the atonement of Christ, and that there is such a thing as eternal life, he longed to be included. He desired the promised blessings so much that he said to Aaron, “I will give up all that I possess, yea, I will forsake my kingdom, that I may have this great joy” (Alma 22:15). And in prayer he said to the Lord, “I will give away all my sins to know thee” (Alma 22:18). It is not surprising that the Lord answered him in a powerful way. What a lesson can be learned from that experience! So often our commitment to spiritual things is cautious, tentative, measured, half-hearted, wavering. And sadly, the resultant blessings are only a shadow of that which is available.

Being Brought into the Light

It is interesting that 2 Nephi tells us we must be “brought into the light” (32:4). The implication of this is that we do not “*come*” into the light on our own, we are “*brought*” in—we are dependent upon something outside ourselves. That something is the Spirit of the Lord. Even though Nephi explained that he would teach “plainly” (31:2), reminding his audience that the Lord speaks to men “according to their language, unto their understanding” (31:3), his hearers (and many later readers?) did

not understand. Pained that the plain instruction, “even as plain as word can be” (32:7), had not reached his “brethren” (32:1), Nephi testified to the critical role of the Holy Ghost in bringing people to an understanding of the doctrine of Christ. Further, he said that if they didn’t receive such understanding from the Spirit, it was because “ye ask not, neither do ye knock; wherefore, ye are not brought into the light, but must perish in the dark” (32:4). To be brought out of the darkness into the light, then, requires that we “knock” and “ask.” It seems clear that by “knock” Nephi meant to act, to be obedient, to “search knowledge” (32:7), to “feast upon the words of Christ” (32:3), and to “enter in by the way” (32:5). And by “ask” he obviously meant prayer. Nephi affirmed that the Spirit of the Lord teaches a man to pray, while “the evil spirit teacheth not a man to pray, but teacheth him that he must not pray” (32:8). Our prayer behavior, therefore, indicates which spirit is influencing us. Nephi’s charge is that “ye must pray always . . . that ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul” (32:9). Is this a selfish prayer? Are we to pray specifically that all we do will redound to our own benefit? Or is Nephi’s intent that we should pray over all we do *so that* (not *that*, but *so that*) the Lord can bless our efforts? There is a significant difference between the two approaches.

Nephi was “left to mourn because of the unbelief . . . wickedness . . . ignorance, and the stiffneckedness of men.” They will neither ask nor knock, and therefore cannot be “brought into the light, but must perish in the dark” (32:4, 7). After his brief discussion of the doctrine of Christ, Nephi was stopped by the Spirit of the Lord from saying more. He declared that no more doctrine would be given until after the Savior visited the Nephites. More doctrine would not be helpful to unbelieving men. In fact, they would need to repent before even that which Nephi had already taught would be useful.

Repentance

Nephi, in 2 Nephi 31, mentions repentance four times. He quotes “the Father” in 31:11, “the Son” in 31:14, and bears his own testimony about repentance in 31:13 and 17. In each case, it is the same message—repentance is a necessary part of the doctrine of Christ. Nephi did not define repentance. He said simply that it is imperative that man repents.

Other scriptures and prophetic commentary help us understand the nature of repentance. In 1832, the Lord revealed to the church through Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon that those who are to be exalted must be “washed and cleansed from *all* their sins” (D&C 76:52; emphasis added; see also 3 Nephi 27:19). Joseph Smith later taught, “any person who is exalted to the highest mansion has to abide a celestial law, and the whole law too” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 331; hereafter *TPJS*). He also said, “to get salvation we must not only do some things, but everything which God has commanded” (*TPJS* 332). God “cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven; And he that repents not, from him shall be taken even the light which he has received . . .” (D&C 1:31-33).

Those who refuse to repent lose light (see D&C 93:39). Those who do repent are forgiven and enjoy a newness of life. From D&C 58 we read, “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more” (v. 42). The Lord delights to forgive! He pleads with us to qualify for that forgiveness through repentance. Note the spirit of these words of the Savior:

If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.

All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? . . .

Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye (Ezekiel 18:21-23, 31, 32).

These verses seem to convey what the Lord means by repentance. It means to change—to change our minds, change our hearts, and change our behavior.

Ultimately, as shown above, these changes must result in obedience to the whole law, and repentance from all sins, even our favorite ones. But is that level of repentance required before baptism? In Chapter 31 verses 14-17, Nephi indicates that water baptism comes after repentance, “after ye have repented of your sins.” The same sequence is suggested in verse 11 where the Father is quoted as saying, “Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son.” However, in verse 13 Nephi’s use of the phrase “repenting of your sins” seems to imply an ongoing process, rather than something that must be completed before baptism.

It appears then, that there are two dimensions of repentance in the doctrine of Christ:

1. There must be an initial change of heart and spirit away from transgressions and toward God, with full purpose of heart, and a willingness to covenant with God to keep his commandments. Such a turning is to precede water baptism.

2. There must be, after baptism, a continuation of that changing, until we have overcome all sin, and abide the whole law. Joseph Smith said: “The nearer man approaches perfection, the clearer are his views, and the greater his enjoyments, till he has overcome the evils of his life and lost every desire for sin. . . . This is a station to which no man ever arrived in a moment” (*TPJS* 51).

The first dimension is undoubtedly what Nephi meant by repentance that must precede baptism.

Water Baptism

Nephi powerfully argues for the absolute necessity of water baptism by contrasting the Savior's holiness to our unholiness. He explains that Jesus needed baptism even though he was holy, and in being baptized, fulfilled all righteousness by his—

1. demonstrating his humility before the Father,
2. witnessing unto the Father that he would keep his commandments, and
3. setting the example for the rest of mankind, showing them "the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter" (31:9).

Nephi declares, "And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!" (31:5). There is an exclamation point, not a question mark, at the end of that sentence in current editions of the Book of Mormon. I believe that punctuation properly conveys Nephi's intent. He was not asking a question, he was making a statement—we need to be baptized by water to demonstrate our own humility before God, to witness unto the Father that we are willing to take upon us the name of Christ and keep his commandments, and to acknowledge and accept the "straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which [we] should enter" (31:7-9, 13).

The expression "baptized *by water*" (emphasis added) introduces the notion that there is more than one kind of baptism. Indeed there is! There is a "baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost," which Nephi promises after proper "repentance and baptism by water" (31:13, 17).

The Baptism of Fire

Nephi speaks of the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost in three verses—2 Nephi 31:13, 14, and 17. As context helps convey intended meaning, it is important to consider the whole text of these verses.

Verse 13 reads:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.

Verse 14 reads:

But, behold, my beloved brethren, thus came the voice of the Son unto me, saying: After ye have repented of your sins, and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water, and have received the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, and can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels, and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me.

Verse 17 reads:

Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for, for this cause have they been shown unto me, that ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.

The words, “then” and “after” in these verses indicate that baptism of fire *follows* genuine repentance (i. e., change of heart and spirit) and water baptism. Verse 17 teaches that forgiveness of sins accompanies the baptism of fire. Verses 13 and 14 state that having received the baptism of fire, one can “speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises to the Holy One of Israel.” Verse 14 warns of the serious responsibility that comes with the

baptism of fire—we would be better off not to know, than to deny Christ after this experience. Peter testified also that “the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” when once-enlightened people turn from the Lord. He said it was like a dog turning to his own vomit again, “and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:20-22).

What else is taught in the scriptures about the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost? Must all receive it? Is it an event or a process? Is it to happen only once in a lifetime, or is it repeatable? What are the indicators that it has happened, or is happening to us?

It is instructive to review scriptural accounts of those who have experienced the baptism of fire, and to learn from prophetic commentary about that experience. Alma provides insight as he discusses his conversion. After three days of terrible spiritual suffering, he “awoke” and said:

I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit. And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and his daughters; And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God (Mosiah 27:24-26).

Note the terms Alma uses to refer to this experience—“born of the Spirit,” “born again,” “born of God,” “changed.” At least two other scriptural terms could be added, i.e., “converted” (Luke 22:32), and “quickenened in the inner man” (Moses 6:65-66). Note, too, Alma’s testimony that *all* must receive this spiritual baptism in order to be saved. Additional insights were given by Alma many years later, as he taught his son Helaman. Alma said he “could remember [his] pains no more,” that “[he] was harrowed up by the memory of [his] sins no more” (Alma 36:19). He added that he felt joy “as exceeding as was [his] pain,” and was filled with “marvelous light” (Alma 36:20).

The same feelings and blessings spoken of by Alma were experienced by those who heard and responded to King Benjamin's great sermon. They were also "filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ" (Mosiah 4:3). They testified that the "Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent . . . has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2), and that "we . . . through . . . the manifestations of his Spirit, have great views of that which is to come; and were it expedient, we could prophesy of all things" (Mosiah 5:3). These same components are found in several other scriptural accounts of the baptism of fire (see Enos 1:1-8; Hel. 5:41-49; 3 Nephi 9:20; Acts 2:1-4; 9:1-18).

Forgiveness of sin, peace of conscience, joy, spiritual witness and enlightenment, change of heart to a desire only to do right, willingness to covenant to obey God, and subsequent responsibility/accountability seem to be common elements, either explicitly stated or implied, in all these references. They are indicators of one's having received the baptism of fire. Clearly they involve more than testimony or church membership. Concerning this truth, President Marion G. Romney taught:

Membership in the Church and conversion are not necessarily synonymous. Being converted, as we are here using the term, and having a testimony are not necessarily the same thing either. A *testimony* comes when the Holy Ghost gives the earnest seeker a witness of the truth. A moving testimony vitalizes faith; that is, it induces repentance and obedience to the commandments. *Conversion*, on the other hand, is the fruit of, or the reward for, repentance and obedience. . . . Conversion is effected by divine forgiveness, which remits sins. The sequence is something like this. An honest seeker hears the message. He asks the Lord in prayer if it is true. The Holy Spirit gives him a witness. This is a testimony. If one's testimony is strong enough, he repents and obeys the commandments. By such obedience he receives divine forgiveness which remits sin. Thus he is converted to a newness of life. His spirit is healed ("Conversion" 1066; emphasis added).

Is this conversion, or healing of the spirit, necessarily an all-of-a-sudden thing, accompanied by spectacular events such as comas, tongues of fire, angels, visions, etc.? Several scriptural accounts include such marvelous experiences, and some may be tempted to think that is the way it must be in all cases. But a modern apostle, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, has discussed this question in these words:

A person may get converted in a moment, miraculously. That is what happened to Alma the younger. He had been baptized in his youth, he had been promised the Holy Ghost, but he had never received it. He was too worldly-wise; he went off with the sons of Mosiah to destroy the Church. . . . Alma was in this state, and then this occasion occurred when a new light came into his soul, when he was changed from his fallen and carnal state to a state of righteousness. In his instance the conversion was miraculous, in the snap of a finger, almost. . . . But that is not the way it happens with most people. With most people, conversion is a process; and it goes step by step, degree by degree, level by level, from a lower state to a higher, from grace to grace, until the time that the individual is wholly turned to the cause of righteousness. Now this means that an individual overcomes one sin today and another sin tomorrow. He perfects his life in one field now, and in another field later on. And the conversion process goes on, until it is completed, until we become, literally, as the Book of Mormon says, saints of God instead of natural men ("Be Ye Converted" 12).

If conversion can be considered a gradual process wherein we overcome one sin today and another tomorrow, at what point does the Holy Ghost come to convey the remission of sins and change our heart? Perhaps the answer to this question is that the Holy Ghost comes quietly each time we overcome a particular sin or weakness, bringing peace of conscience concerning that part of our life, and strengthening our desire to do right. Continuing this process qualifies us eventually for a remission of all our sins—a complete baptism of fire. To be complete, the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, like the baptism of water, requires full immersion.

Acknowledging that spiritual rebirth can happen over time is not to suggest that it must take years. The intensity with which a person pursues the enterprise has much to do with how long it

takes. Consider, for example, the delightful metamorphosis of young missionaries, or “new converts,” or previously casual Latter-day Saints who turn with “full purpose of heart” and “real intent” to the things of God. It does not take long for them or for others to notice a real difference in their behavior, countenance, desires and commitment.

When comparing one person’s experience with the baptism of fire to that of another, it is helpful to remember Joseph Smith’s explanation that the Holy Ghost may have a “more powerful effect” upon a Gentile than upon the literal seed of Abraham. With the Gentile there is a purging and “a new creation”; with the seed of Abraham the effect is “calm and serene” (*TPJS* 150). Perhaps the same principle applies when considering the effect of the refining power of the Holy Ghost upon “spiritual gentiles”—those who need a great deal of changing, as compared with the spiritual seed of Abraham—who need changing, but not nearly so much.

It seems unwise, then, to compare a seemingly unspectacular step by step *process* with someone’s marvelous sudden *event*, and consider the process less valid than the event. Both are valid ways to come to the baptism of fire. Though they do not happen in just the same way, the *results* are the same. The common elements are all there—forgiveness, peace of conscience, joy, spiritual enlightenment, desire for righteousness, commitment to obey, and responsibility. Perhaps the difference between these two approaches—the event and the process—can be likened to the difference between suddenly emerging from a dark room into bright sunlight as opposed to experiencing the dawning of the day. The dawning is more gradual, but results in just as much light.

If we move gradually, like the dawn, toward being born of the Spirit, how can we judge our progress? Consider Elder Bruce R. McConkie’s words from the same 1968 stake conference:

Well, try a little test on yourself. You know you have a testimony, that is not open to question. You already know the work

is true. Are you converted? Have you been born again? Read the fifth chapter of Alma for the recitation of the tests that tell a person whether he has been born again and how he knows. You know if you have been born again, or you know *the degree to which you have been born again*; it is the measure to which you keep the commandments and feed the Lord's sheep and strengthen your brethren. In other words, it is the measure of your involvement in the things of the Spirit, in the things of the Church (emphasis added).

Another measure of one's level of conversion is to examine the longings of the heart. *Before* being born of the Spirit, a person hungers and thirsts after the things of the world, while dutifully performing the things of God; *after* the baptism of fire, a person hungers and thirsts after the things of the Spirit, while dutifully performing necessary worldly things.

Once we have received the baptism of fire, will it always stay? Can we lose the forgiveness, peace, joy, enlightenment, and commitment? Did the people of King Benjamin forever after have "no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually"? Is it possible that in the days and weeks and months following their spiritual experience some might have become casual, or even disobedient, and lost those feelings? That possibility is explicitly acknowledged in 2 Nephi 31:14, where the Savior warns about the seriousness of denying him after having received the baptism of fire. It is also implied by Alma's question, "And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?" (Alma 5:26).

Suppose someone does lose the desire "to sing the song of redeeming love," what then? Moroni recorded that in his day, those once "cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost," who were later found guilty of iniquity, were disciplined; "but as oft as they repented and sought forgiveness, with real intent, they were forgiven" (Moroni 6:1-8). And it can be so for others. Peace, joy, a quiet conscience, desire for righteousness, and the commitment to obey can be regained the same way they were

originally acquired—through full-purpose-of-heart repentance. This is made possible by the Atonement. However, it is not to be thought an easy or trivial thing. Joseph Smith warned, “Repentance is a thing that cannot be trifled with every day. Daily transgression and daily repentance is not that which is pleasing in the sight of God” (*TPJS* 148). President Spencer W. Kimball wrote, “Sin is intensely habit-forming”; it can progressively weaken our desire to repent, and eventually rob us of the power to do so (117; see also Alma 34:35). King Benjamin told his people it requires a constant vigil to “retain a remission of [our] sins” (Mosiah 4:12). There is much to consider concerning the baptism of fire. Mormon included enough of Nephi’s teachings to let us know how important it is and where it fits among other elements of the doctrine of Christ. It is absolutely necessary for all who are to be saved in the kingdom of God. It requires one to qualify by honest repentance and baptism and obedience. It brings with it forgiveness, peace of conscience, joy, desire to do right, commitment to obey, and spiritual enlightenment. And, as we will now consider, it leads to even greater things.

Pressing Forward with Steadfastness

Nephi explains that “repentance and baptism . . . and . . . a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” take us through the “gate” and place us on the “strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:17-18). This is a sobering thought! With what it takes to get to that point, one might wish it were near the end of the path to eternal life, rather than the very beginning. But Nephi’s point is clear: “And *then* are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate” (31:18). Nephi asks then answers the next obvious question:

And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of

Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore . . . (31:19-20).

And then he goes on to tell us what else *we* must do. The essence of this response seems to be that the credit for our getting through the gate and onto the strait and narrow path belongs to Christ, not us, but that *now we must* rely appropriately upon our own merit, and not depend “wholly” upon the merit of Christ. We must demonstrate that our change of heart is permanent, that our commitment to obey is stronger than the enticements of the world and the devil, and we must do this day after day, year after year, through thick and thin, through good times and bad. We must do the following things:

a. “Press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” (v. 20).

To be steadfast means to be firm in belief and adherence. Dictionaries generally include such synonyms as loyal, true, faithful, staunch, resolute. Obviously, these attributes must be focused “in Christ.” In addition to being steadfast, we must also

b. Have “a perfect brightness of hope” (v. 20).

What is this hope? Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written: “As used in the revelations, hope is the desire of faithful people to gain eternal salvation in the Kingdom of God hereafter. It is not a flimsy, ethereal desire, . . . but a desire coupled with full expectation of receiving the coveted reward” (*Mormon Doctrine* 365). A good case can be made for the idea that having this hope results from the change of heart when one is baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost (Dahl 144-45). The heart is changed from a desire to do evil to a desire to do good—to a longing for righteousness (see Mosiah 5:2; Alma 13:12; 19:33; 36:22). Note how Nephi describes this hope. He says we must have a “perfect brightness of hope”—not just a little, or even quite a bit, but a “perfect brightness.” But are we expected to have that perfect brightness all at once, when we pass through the gate onto the path? Additional descriptions of hope in the Book of Mormon suggest that there are levels of hope, and that we grow into a perfect brightness—that as we progress along the strait and

narrow path toward eternal life, our desire to do righteous acts intensifies until we finally attain the perfect brightness (see Jacob 2:19; 4:11; Ether 12:32; Moroni 7:3).

Along with hope, which is the desire to live righteously for ourselves, Nephi says we must have a love of God and of all men. That love is charity, or the pure love of Christ. When we have charity, we long for others to have the blessings of the gospel as intensely as we desire those blessings for ourselves (Dahl 147).

In addition to being steadfast and having hope and charity, Nephi says we must feast “upon the word of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:20) to move forward along the strait and narrow path.

c. Feast “upon the word of Christ.”

Again, Nephi’s choice of words is instructive. “To feast” means something quite different than “to nibble” or “snack,” or even “read.” “Feast” means an elaborate banquet, and usually connotes a celebration to be joyfully anticipated, savored. What reason is given for feasting on the words of Christ? Nephi perceived that his brethren would ask about what they were to do once they had entered the strait and narrow path (32:1). He answered, “feast upon the words of Christ; for behold, the words of Christ will tell you all things what ye should do” (32:3). He explains that the words of Christ come “by the power of the Holy Ghost” (32:2, 3). He makes a point of repeating the fact that those who receive the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost can then speak with the tongue of angels, by the power of the Spirit (31:13; 32:2-3). Where then do we find the words of Christ upon which to feast? Undoubtedly, the scriptures contain the words of Christ inasmuch as they are the words of “holy men of God [who] spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21). Also, when the Lord’s servants speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, their words represent the “will, . . . mind, . . . word, . . . [and] voice” of the Lord himself (D&C 68:1-4). Personal inspiration is a third important source of the words of Christ. Nephi makes clear that “if ye will enter in by the way,

and receive the Holy Ghost, it will show unto you all things what ye should do” (32:5). Feasting on the word of Christ, then, includes drinking deeply from the scriptures and the inspired words of the Lord’s servants, and receiving personal revelation.

Truly, as Nephi indicated, all is not done when we get through the gate and on the strait and narrow path that leads to eternal life. We “must” thereafter “press forward,” feasting upon and steadfastly adhering to the words of Christ, in a spirit of hope and love, until the end.

Enduring to the End

Nephi says we must endure to the end. To the end of what? To the end of the path to eternal life! We do not reach the end of the path until we abide the whole law. “For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory” (D&C 88:22). Yet, almost everyone leaves mortal life with some deficiencies. Many leave early, before they have had much opportunity to “press forward” along the path. Are the things we have left undone in mortality taken care of by some sudden dispensation of virtue in the next life? That is unlikely. It appears that most of us will still have some distance to travel, even after death, to reach the end of the path that leads to eternal life.

There is another dimension to enduring. It has to do with enduring trials. Joseph Smith taught:

After a person has faith in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized for the remission of his sins and receives the Holy Ghost, (by the laying on of hands), which is the first Comforter, then let him continue to humble himself before God, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and living by every word of God, and the Lord will soon say unto him, Son, thou shalt be exalted. *When the Lord has thoroughly proved him, and finds that the man is determined to serve him at all hazards*, then the man will find his calling and election made sure, then it will be his privilege to receive the other Comforter, which the Lord hath promised the Saints, as is recorded in the

testimony of St. John, in the 14th chapter, from the 12th to the 27th verses (*TPJS* 150; emphasis added).

“Thoroughly proved . . . at all hazards!” That is not particularly comforting doctrine, but it is clearly the doctrine of the scriptures (see D&C 98:11-15; 101:1-4; 136:31).

Did you notice parallels in Joseph Smith’s and Nephi’s explanations concerning the necessary elements in getting onto and proceeding along the path to eternal life? Both speak of repentance, baptism and receiving the Holy Ghost as initial requirements. Nephi says (2 Nephi 31:20) one must then “press forward with steadfastness”; Joseph Smith says, “living by every word of God.” Nephi speaks of “hope”; Joseph renders it, “hungering and thirsting after righteousness.” Nephi refers to “enduring to the end”; Joseph says one must be “thoroughly proved . . . at all hazards.” They also agree on the reward: Nephi says, “behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life”; Joseph explains, “then the man will find his calling and his election made sure.”

The Promise of Eternal Life

Receiving the promise of eternal life, or having one’s calling and election made sure, or receiving the more sure word of prophecy, “means a man’s knowing that he is sealed up unto eternal life, by revelation and the spirit of prophecy, through the power of the Holy Priesthood” (D&C 131:5). Associated with this great blessing is the privilege of receiving the “other comforter.” Joseph Smith explained:

Now what is this other Comforter? It is no more nor less than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; and this is the sum and substance of the whole matter; that when any man obtains this last Comforter, he will have the personage of Jesus Christ to attend him, or appear unto him from time to time, and even He will manifest the Father unto him, and they will take up their abode with him, and the visions of the heavens will be opened unto him, and the Lord will teach him face to face, and he may have a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; and this is the state and place the ancient Saints

arrived at when they had such glorious visions—Isaiah, Ezekiel, John upon the Isle of Patmos, St. Paul in the three heavens, and all the Saints who held communion with the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn (*TPJS* 150-51).

It is interesting to examine 2 Nephi 31:10-15, in light of Joseph Smith's reference to someone's seeing both the Son and the Father and being taught face to face. Nephi quotes the Son and the Father alternately in these verses, acknowledging that he heard their voices (vv. 14-15). Earlier in his record, Nephi said he had seen Christ (2 Nephi 11:3). It seems reasonable to conclude that Nephi had his calling and election made sure and that he enjoyed the privilege of the Second Comforter.

Speaking of making one's calling and election sure, the Prophet Joseph said, "This principle ought (in its proper place) to be taught, for God hath not revealed anything to Joseph, but what He will make known unto the Twelve, and even the least Saint may know all things as fast as he is able to bear them . . ." (*TPJS* 149). He encouraged the Saints to make themselves worthy of this blessing in the following words:

Then I would exhort you to go on and continue to call upon God until you make your calling and election sure for yourselves, by obtaining this more sure word of prophecy, and wait patiently for the promise until you obtain it (*TPJS* 299).

Oh! I beseech you to go forward, go forward and make your calling and your election sure (*TPJS* 366).

Recent and current apostles and prophets have also addressed this subject, bearing testimony of its truthfulness and encouraging the saints to qualify for its blessings (see Smith 2:46-47; Romney, "Making Our Calling and Election Sure" 1115-16; "The Light of Christ" 43-45; McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 3:323-55).

The doctrine is true; the promise is sure. Perhaps, however, a word of caution needs to be added. There is the danger of focusing so intently on the final summit that we do not pay sufficient attention to more immediate, and for the moment, more important matters. Like the Jews of old, we could look

“beyond the mark,” thus impairing our spiritual vision, and stumble from the strait and narrow path (Jacob 4:14). A great lesson can be learned from the experience of Alma, recorded in Mosiah 26. The Lord covenanted that Alma would have eternal life even though Alma was not directly seeking that blessing. There is no indication in the record that he was even thinking about it. As the chief high priest (president) of the church, Alma was deeply concerned about many of the rising generation who did not believe. Their hearts were hardened, they wouldn’t pray, and they wouldn’t be baptized. He pleaded with the Lord for guidance as to “what he should do concerning this matter, for he feared that he should do wrong in the sight of God” (v. 13). He “poured out his whole soul to God” (v. 14). And the voice of the Lord came to him in response to his pleading. But before telling Alma how to deal with his problem, the Lord blessed him for his faith and devotion, and said, “Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee that thou shalt have eternal life” (v. 20). Truly, “he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39).

It seems that the best way to seek to make our calling and election sure is to travel extremely well that part of the strait and narrow path that is immediately before us. Then both current and future blessings, even reaching the summit, will unfold as naturally, and fully, and as unforced as the blooming of a beautiful flower.

Conclusion

What then is the doctrine of Christ? It is seeking the things of God with full purpose of heart, honest prayer, genuine repentance, baptism by water, baptism by fire, pressing forward with steadfastness in Christ, having hope and love, feasting on the words of Christ, enduring to the end of the strait and narrow path, and receiving the promise of eternal life.

And now, behold, 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. And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end. Amen (2 Nephi 31:21).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Dahl, Larry E. "Faith, Hope, and Charity." *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*. Edited by Paul R. Cheesman. Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988, pp. 137-50.
- Kimball, Spencer W. *The Miracle of Forgiveness*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969.
- McConkie, Bruce R. "Be Ye Converted." Address given at the BYU First Stake Quarterly Conference (11 Feb 1968). Transcript in possession of the author.
- . *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*. 3 vols. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973.
- . *Mormon Doctrine*. 2nd ed. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966.
- Romney, Marion G. "Conversion." *The Improvement Era* (Dec 1963) 66:1065-67; also in *Conference Report* (Oct 1963) pp. 23-26.
- . "The Light of Christ." *Ensign* (May 1977) 7:43-45; also in *Conference Report* (Apr 1977) pp. 59-63.
- . "Making Our Calling and Election Sure." *The Improvement Era* (Dec 1965) 68:1115-16; also in *Conference Report* (Oct 1965) pp. 20-23.
- Smith, Joseph Fielding. *Doctrines of Salvation*. 3 vols. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955.
- Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1956.