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Elder Bruce R. McConkie after April conference of 1984.

Courtesy of Joseph Fielding McConkie, Orem, Utah.

# The Foolishness of Teaching

*Elder Bruce R. McConkie*

*The year 2005 marks twenty years since the passing of Elder Bruce R. McConkie, an Apostle and a gifted teacher. In his honor, we are reprinting this classic article that is condensed from an address to religious educators on September 18, 1981.*

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I desire to be guided by the Spirit, and I shall take as my subject “the foolishness of teaching.” I do not say “the foolishness of teachers.” There may be some of that, but I am not aware of any. I take this expression “the foolishness of teaching” from a similar statement made by the Apostle Paul. But first, I think we ought to set forth the dignity and preeminence of gospel teaching and the eternal worth and everlasting value that come because of those who teach the gospel in the way the Lord intended it should be taught.

Yours is a high, a holy, and a glorious work. It was of you, as some of the chief gospel teachers in the Church, that President J. Reuben Clark said:

You teachers have a great mission. As teachers you stand upon the highest peak in education, for what teaching can compare in priceless value and in far-reaching effect with that which deals with man as he was in the eternity of yesterday, as he is in the mortality of today, and as he will be in the forever of tomorrow. Not only time but eternity is your field. Salvation of yourself not only, but of those who come within the purlieu of your temple, is the blessing you seek, and which, doing your duty, you will gain. How brilliant will be your crown of glory, with each soul saved an encrusted jewel thereon.<sup>1</sup>

Now with that statement setting the tone and conveying the spirit for what, if I am properly guided, I hope to say, I shall turn to that wondrous verse in the twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians in which Paul speaks of the kind of teachers who are involved in proclaiming the message of

salvation to the world. He is identifying the true church. He is giving some of the essential identifying characteristics of the kingdom that has the power to save men. He says, “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

That verse tells you some of the proofs or evidences or witnesses that the work is true. It names some of the essential identifying characteristics of the true Church. Where there are apostles and prophets and teachers of the sort and kind of whom Paul is speaking, there will be found the true church and kingdom of God on earth. And where any of these are not found, there the Church and kingdom of God is not. That makes our living prophet an evidence and a witness that this work is true. The fact we are guided by a prophet shows we have the true Church. That makes all of the apostles who have been called in this dispensation witnesses and evidences and proofs to the world that the work is true. True apostles are always found in the true Church. I think this order of priority is perfect: apostles, prophets, teachers. And that places you, because you are the kind of teachers that Paul is talking about, that makes you the third great group whose very existence establishes the truth and divinity of the work. This means that if you learn how to present the message of salvation, and in fact do it in the way that the Lord intends that it be presented, you stand to all the world as an evidence that this is God’s kingdom. As we go forward in this presentation, I think it will be evident to all that no one is or can be a teacher in the divine sense, in the eternal sense of which President Clark is speaking, except a legal administrator in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—except someone who is so living that he *is* endowed with the gift and power of the Holy Ghost.

We are not talking about worldly teachers. We do not concern ourselves a great deal about those in the various academic or scientific disciplines. What they do is meritorious and appropriate so long as it conforms to the standards of truth and integrity and virtue. Their work is in no sense to be demeaned. But the kind of teaching that is involved where the Church and kingdom of God on earth is concerned—the kind of teaching *you* do, is as the heavens above the earth when compared to the intellectual type of teaching and learning that is to be had out in the world.

All of us are agents of the Lord. We are the servants of the Lord. In the law, there is a branch that is called the law of agency. And in the law of agency, there are principals and there are agents. These are something akin to master and servant. An agent represents a principal,

and the acts of the agent bind the principal, provided they are performed within the proper scope and authorization, within the authority delegated to the agent. Now, the Lord said to us, “Wherefore, as ye are agents, ye are on the Lord’s errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord’s business” (D&C 64:29).

We are engaged in our Father’s business. Our Father’s business is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. We do not have anything to do with bringing to pass immortality. That comes as a free gift to all men because of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. But we have a very great deal to do with bringing to pass eternal life for ourselves and for our brethren and sisters and in offering it to our Father’s other children. Eternal life is the kind of life that God our Father lives. It is the name of the life He lives. It is to have exaltation and glory and honor and dominion in His presence everlastingly. And it comes by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. It is full and complete salvation. And so we bring to pass, in a sense, the eternal life of men by persuading them to conform to the standards that the Lord has set.

Eternal life and immortality both come by the grace of God. They are made available through the Atonement, but in the case of the great gift of eternal life, which is the greatest of all the gifts of God, it comes by conformity, and obedience, and sacrifice—by doing all of the things that are counseled and required in the inspired word.

Now let me point to the source of my text and my title, “The Foolishness of Teaching.” It is a paraphrase of Paul’s words. “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 1:17). And I will use *preach* and *teach*, for our purposes, as synonyms. Preaching is teaching, and teaching, in many respects, is a perfected form of preaching.

[He] sent me . . . to preach [teach] the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching [or teaching] of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:17–21)

Now I turn to the teaching aspect: “It pleased God by the foolishness of [teaching] to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach [meaning we teach] Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the

Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Corinthians 1:21–25).

Now think of yourselves as I read this next scripture. Think of Presidents Wilford Woodruff and Lorenzo Snow. Think of the men who have presided over this dispensation. Think of them as they have been viewed by the worldly wise and the aristocrats and the highly intellectual and by those with great mental capacities. Paul says: “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Corinthians 1:26–29).

We are the weak and the simple and the unlearned as far as the intellectual giants of the world are concerned, but our teaching is not in the intellectual field. It is pleasing if we have some intellectual attainments. But basically and fundamentally, as teachers, we are dealing with the things of the Spirit.

At general conference in April, I was doing what we are pretty much required to do now. I was reading the expressions that I was making. And then at the end I said a few sentences extemporaneously. As I said them, I had in mind the document that had recently come to light purporting to be an account of a prophetic utterance or a blessing given by the Prophet Joseph to one of his sons. And so I felt impressed, after my formal remarks were concluded, to bear a witness of what was involved in succession in the presidency. And I named all of the Presidents from Joseph Smith to Spencer W. Kimball and said that down that line the power and authority and keys of the kingdom had come. Then, I said something that highly offended all the intellectuals: “What I am saying is what the Lord would say if he were here.”<sup>22</sup> Now the only way you can say a thing like that is to be guided and prompted by the power of the Holy Spirit because the Spirit is a revelator and places in your mind the thoughts that the Lord wants expressed.

Well, our intellectual friends reading that in the account went into a great explosive tizzy, whatever that is. And in decrying the stand I had taken, one of the chief among them said, “Well, what can you expect when they have incompetents like Bruce R. McConkie running

loose?”<sup>3</sup> I read about it in one of the semi-anti-Mormon publications. And when I read it, it gave me a great feeling of personal satisfaction. I thought, “This is marvelous. It is just as important to know who your enemies are as your friends.” And of course, the intellectuals in the world view our teachings as foolishness, or as Paul calls it, “the foolishness of God” (1 Corinthians 1:25).

Well, there is worldly teaching and there is Church teaching. There is teaching by the power of the intellect alone, and there is teaching by the power of the intellect when quickened and enlightened by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“O that cunning plan of the evil one! [Jacob is speaking.] O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish. But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:28–29).

That is our stand in the Church and kingdom.

### **The Teacher’s Divine Commission**

If I may now, I shall take the heading “The Teacher’s Divine Commission” and make it a subtext or a subheading to this matter of the foolishness of teaching. I shall suggest to you five things that compose and comprise the teacher’s divine commission. We are talking about divine, inspired, heavenly, Church teaching, the type and kind in which we are, or should be, involved.

1. *We are commanded to teach the principles of the gospel.* Our revelation says: “And again, the elders, priests and teachers of this church [this language is mandatory] shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in which is the fulness of the gospel. And they shall observe the covenants and church articles to do them, and these shall be their teachings, as they shall be directed by the Spirit” (D&C 42:12–13).

We are to teach the principles of the gospel. We are to teach the doctrines of salvation. We have some passing interest in ethical principles but not a great deal as far as emphasis in teaching is concerned. If we teach the doctrines of salvation, the ethical concepts automatically follow. We do not need to spend long periods of time or make elaborate presentations in teaching honesty or integrity or unselfishness or some other ethical principle. Any Presbyterian can do that. Any Methodist can do that. But if we teach the doctrines of salvation, which

are basic and fundamental, the ethical concepts automatically follow. It is the testimony and knowledge of the truth that causes people to reach high ethical standards in any event. And so our revelation says: “And I give unto you a commandment [again we are using mandatory language; the Lord is talking] that you shall teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom. Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand” (D&C 88:77–78).

That last modifying phrase indicates that we are to leave the mysteries alone. There are some things that are not given us in clarity and, as of now, do not need to be fully comprehended in order to work out our salvation. We stay away from these; we stay with the basic concepts. Now President Clark’s words:

These students are prepared to believe and understand that all these things are matters of faith, not to be explained or understood by any process of human reason, and probably not by any experiment of known physical science.

These students (to put the matter shortly) are prepared to understand and to believe that there is a natural world and there is a spiritual world; that the things of the natural world will not explain the things of the spiritual world; that the things of the spiritual world cannot be understood or comprehended by the things of the natural world; that you cannot rationalize the things of the spirit, because first, the things of the spirit are not sufficiently known and comprehended, and secondly, because finite mind and reason cannot comprehend or explain infinite wisdom and ultimate truth.

These students already know that they must be honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and do good to all men, and that “if there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things”—these things they have been taught from very birth. They should be encouraged in all proper ways to do these things which they know to be true, but they do not need to have a year’s course of instruction to make them believe and know them.

These students fully sense the hollowness of teachings which would make the gospel plan a mere system of ethics, they know that Christ’s teachings are in the highest degree ethical, but they also know they are more than this. They will see that ethics relate primarily to the doings of this life, and that to make of the gospel a mere system of ethics is to confess a lack of faith, if not a disbelief, in the hereafter. They know that the gospel teachings not only touch this life, but the life that is to come, with its salvation and exaltation as the final goal.

These students hunger and thirst, as did their fathers before them, for a testimony of the things of the spirit and of the hereafter, and knowing that you cannot rationalize eternity, they seek faith, and the knowledge which follows faith. They sense by the spirit they have, that the testimony they seek is engendered and nurtured by the testimony of others, and that to gain this testimony which they seek for.<sup>4</sup>

Now notice this. I never heard this better expressed by anyone than President Clark gives it:

[They know that] one living, burning, honest testimony of a righteous God-fearing man that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph was God's prophet is worth a thousand books and lectures aimed at debasing the Gospel to a system of ethics or seeking to rationalize infinity.<sup>5</sup> Conversion comes through testimony. We must teach in that way, as I will subsequently, with some particularity, point out.

There is neither reason nor is there excuse for our Church religious teaching and training facilities and institutions, unless the youth are to be taught and trained in the principles of the Gospel, embracing therein the two great elements that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph was God's prophet. The teaching of a system of ethics to the students is not a sufficient reason for running our seminaries and institutes. The great public school system teaches ethics. The students of seminaries and institutes should of course be taught the ordinary canons of good and righteous living, for these are part, and an essential part, of the Gospel. But there are the great principles involved in eternal life, the Priesthood, the resurrection, and many like other things, that go way beyond these canons of good living. These great fundamental principles also must be taught to the youth; they are the things the youth wish first to know about.<sup>6</sup>

From all this I conclude that we should do as Jesus did. We should teach the gospel. We should teach the gospel only. We should teach nothing but the gospel. Ethics are a part of the gospel, but they will take care of themselves if we preach the gospel. Teach doctrine. Teach sound doctrine. Teach the doctrines of the kingdom. You say, "What did Jesus teach?" Well, of course we have the great accounts of His teachings about ethical principles, but notice this: "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15).

Now what did Jesus teach? Jesus taught the gospel. Unfortunately, from our standpoint, there is not very much preserved in the New Testament account of what He taught. I say from our standpoint because we as a people, having the Restoration and the light of heaven, would be able to recognize and glory in the gospel truths He taught had they been recorded and preserved for us. But obviously, in the wisdom

of Him who knoweth all things and doeth all things right, it was the intent and design that only the portion of His teachings that are found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John should have been preserved for men in this day.

But with our background and understanding, when the revelation says that Jesus preached the gospel, we know thereby what He preached. And we know it simply by answering the questions. What is the gospel? What is the eternal plan of salvation? What truths has God given us that we must believe and understand and obey to gain peace in this life and glory and honor and dignity in the life to come?

The gospel can be defined from two perspectives. We can talk about it in the eternal sense as it was in the mind of God when He ordained and established all things. And we can talk about it in a more restricted sense as it is involved in the lives of people here.

Now in the eternal and unlimited sense, the gospel that Jesus taught was itself infinite and eternal. It included the creation of all things, the nature of this probationary estate, and the great and eternal plan of redemption. He taught that God was the creator of all things, that He created this earth and all things that on it are. He taught that there was the Fall of Adam—that Adam and all forms of life fell, or changed, from their original paradisiacal state to the mortal state that now prevails—and that as a consequence of that Fall, which brought temporal and spiritual death into the world, an atonement of a divine being was required. Someone had to come and ransom men from the effects of the Fall and bring to pass a continuation of temporal life, which is immortality, and make available spiritual life again, which is eternal life.

The great and eternal plan of salvation, from God's viewpoint, is the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. If there had been no creation, there would be nothing. If things had not been created in the manner and form and way they were, there could have been no Fall—and, as a consequence, no procreation and no mortality and no death. And if there had been no Fall of Adam, which brought temporal and spiritual death into the world, there would be no need for the redemption of the Lord Jesus.

The plan of salvation, to us, is the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus by which immortality and eternal life come. When you talk about the gospel from the standpoint of men, you are talking about the things men must do to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling before the Lord. And what is involved there is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; repentance from sin; baptism by immersion under

the hands of a legal administrator for the remission of sins; the receipt of the gift of the Holy Ghost, which gift is the right to the constant companionship of that member of the Godhead; and then, finally, enduring in righteousness and integrity and devotion and obedience all of one's days. That is the plan of salvation as far as acts on our part are concerned. But that plan of salvation rests on the greater eternal concept of the atoning sacrifice, which grew out of the Fall, which Fall grew out of the Creation.

Jesus preached the gospel. Jesus was a theologian. There has never been a theologian on earth to compare with Him. In this field, as in all others, no man ever spake as He did. In His providences, He let Paul and Peter and some of the others present to us the theological concepts that had to be known in order for people to gain salvation. But Jesus preached the gospel. That, of course, is what we are expected to do; that is the first great concept. Here is the second:

2. *We are to teach the principles of the gospel as they are found in the standard works.* “And let them [the elders of the kingdom] journey from thence preaching the word by the way, saying none other things than that which the prophets and apostles have written, and that which is taught them by the Comforter through the prayer of faith” (D&C 52:9).

We have a multitude of passages that talk about searching the scriptures, about searching “these commandments.” We have counsel to “ponder” the things of the Lord, to “treasure up” the words of truth. He told the Nephites, “Great are the words of Isaiah” (3 Nephi 23:1). He said to them, “Search the prophets” (3 Nephi 23:5).

These and other passages show we should study the standard works of the Church. The scriptures themselves present the gospel in the way the Lord wants it presented to us in our day. I do not say that it is always presented to men in the same way. There have been civilizations of a higher spiritual standing than ours. I think He did some different kind of teaching among the people in Enoch's day and in that golden Nephite era when for two hundred years everyone was conforming to principles of light and truth and had the Holy Spirit for a guide. We know perfectly well that during the millennium, the teaching processes will change. One of the revelations says of that day: “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them” (Jeremiah 31:34).

But for *our* day and *our* time and *our* hour, the time of our mortal probation, we are to teach in the way things are recorded in the standard works that we have. And if you want to know what empha-

sis should be given to gospel principles, you simply teach the whole standard works; and, automatically, in the process, you will have given the Lord's emphasis to every doctrine and every principle. As far as learning the gospel and teaching the gospel are concerned, the Book of Mormon, by all odds, is the most important of the standard works—because in simplicity and in plainness, it sets forth in a definitive manner the doctrines of the gospel. If you would like to test that sort of thing, just arbitrarily choose a hundred or so gospel subjects and then put in parallel columns what the Bible says about them and what the Book of Mormon says about them. In about 95 percent of the cases, the clarity and perfection and superlative nature of the Book of Mormon teaching will be so evident that it will be perfectly clear that that is the place to learn the gospel.

I think, in many respects, that the literature and the language and the power of expression in Paul's writings and in Isaiah's writings are superior to what is in the Book of Mormon. But we understand the Bible because we have the knowledge gained out of the Book of Mormon. The epistles of Paul, for instance, were written to members of the Church. I do not think he has any epistles that are intended to be definitive explanations of gospel doctrines. He was writing the portion of the Lord's word that the Corinthians or the Hebrews or the Romans needed—while being aware of the problems and questions and difficulties that confronted them. In effect, he was writing to people who already had the knowledge that is in the Book of Mormon. That means, obviously, that there are no people on earth who can understand the epistles of Paul and the other brethren in the New Testament until they first get the knowledge that we as Latter-day Saints have.

The Book of Mormon is a definitive, all-embracing, comprehensive account. Our scripture says it contains the fulness of the everlasting gospel. What that means is that it is a record of God's dealings with a people who had the fulness of the gospel. It means that in it are recorded the basic principles men must believe to work out their salvation. After we accept and believe and comprehend the principles therein recorded, we are qualified and prepared to take another step and to begin to acquire a knowledge of the mysteries of godliness.

After somebody gets the basic understanding that is in the Book of Mormon—about salvation, for instance—then he is in a position to envision and comprehend what section 76 is all about. When that section was first given in our dispensation, the Prophet forbade the missionaries to talk about it when they went out into the world and told them that if they did they would heap persecution upon their

heads because it was something that was beyond the spiritual capacity of those to whom they were sent. We do not have that type of religious climate today, but it was one that prevailed in that day.

I think this language in the Psalms is about as good as anything that has been written about the scriptures: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:7–11).

I love these words also that Paul wrote to Timothy: “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:15–17).

President Clark said on this point:

You do have an interest in matters purely cultural and in matters of purely secular knowledge; but, I repeat again for emphasis, your chief interest, your essential and all but sole duty, is to teach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as that has been revealed in these latter days. You are to teach this Gospel using as your sources and authorities the Standard Works of the Church, and the words of those whom God has called to lead His people in these last days. You are not, whether high or low, to intrude into your work your own peculiar philosophy, no matter what its source or how pleasing or rational it seems to you to be. To do so would be to have as many different churches as we have seminaries—and that is chaos.<sup>7</sup>

3. *We are to teach by the power of the Holy Ghost.* There are some passages on this matter of teaching by the power of the Holy Ghost that are so strong and so blunt and so plain that unless we understand what is involved, it almost makes us fear ever to teach. And a couple of them I shall read: “And the Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith: and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach” (D&C 42:14). That is a mandatory thing, a prohibition. “And all this ye shall observe to do as I have commanded concerning your teaching, until the fulness of my scriptures is given. And as ye shall lift up your voices

by the Comforter, ye shall speak and prophesy as seemeth me good; For, behold, the Comforter knoweth all things, and beareth record of the Father and of the Son” (D&C 42:15–17).

We are talking about Church teaching, gospel teaching, teaching spiritual things, teaching by the power of the Holy Ghost. And if you teach by the power of the Holy Ghost, you say the things that the Lord wants said, or you say the things the Lord would say if He Himself were here. The Holy Ghost is a revelator, and you are speaking words of revelation. And that kind of preacher or teacher, as we have seen, is the third great essential identifying officer of God’s kingdom.

“First apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

“And now come, saith the Lord, by the Spirit, unto the elders of his church, and let us reason together, that ye may understand; Let us reason even as a man reasoneth one with another face to face. Now, when a man reasoneth he is understood of man, because he reasoneth as a man; even so will I, the Lord, reason with you that you may understand” (D&C 50:10–12).

Have in mind as we consider these matters from section 50 the law pertaining to principals and agents, to masters and servants. Consider how these apply to a divine being who gives direction to someone else, letting him know what he should teach and what he should say.

Have in mind also that it really does not make a particle of difference to any of you what we teach. I often think as I go around the Church and preach in various meetings that it just does not make a snap of the fingers difference to me what I am talking about. I do not care what I talk about. All I am concerned with is getting in tune with the Spirit and expressing the thoughts, in the best language and way that I can, that are implanted there by the power of the Spirit. The Lord knows what a congregation needs to hear, and He has provided a means to give that revelation to every preacher and every teacher.

We do not create the doctrines of the gospel. People who ask questions about the gospel, a good portion of the time, are looking for an answer that sustains a view they have expressed. They want to justify a conclusion that they have reached instead of looking for the ultimate truth in the field. Once again, it does not make one snap of the fingers difference to me what the doctrines of the Church are. I cannot create a doctrine. I cannot originate a concept of eternal truth. The only thing I ought to be concerned with is learning what the Lord thinks about a doctrine. If I ask a question of someone to learn something, I ought *not* to be seeking for a confirmation of a view that I have expressed. I

ought to be seeking knowledge and wisdom. It should not make any difference to me whether the doctrine is on the right hand or on the left. My sole interest and my sole concern would be to find out what the Lord thinks on the subject.

And we have the power to do that. I suppose that is part, at least, of what Paul had in mind when he said of the Saints, “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16).

If we have the mind of Christ, we think what Christ thinks and we say what Christ says; and out of those two things come our acts, and so we do what Christ would have done in an equivalent situation. Well, back to section 50 in which the Lord is reasoning with us: “Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained?” (D&C 50:13). That is, “What agency did I give you? What commission have I conferred upon you? What authorization is yours? What divine commandment came from me to you?” And then He answers, and His answer tells us what we are ordained to do: “To preach my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to teach the truth. And then received ye spirits which ye could not understand, and received them to be of God; and in this are ye justified?” (D&C 50:14–15).

I’d like to try that again. “And then received ye spirits [doctrines, tenets, views, theories] which ye could not understand” (D&C 50:15). Then you received something that you could not understand and thought it came from God. And are you justified? “Behold ye shall answer this question yourselves; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto you; he that is weak among you hereafter shall be made strong” (D&C 50:16).

Now here is some very strong language. If you can italicize words in your mind, as it were, when they are read, do it with these words: “Verily I say unto you, he that is ordained of me and sent forth to preach the word of truth by the Comforter [that is our commission], in the Spirit of truth, doth he preach it by the Spirit of truth or some other way? And if it be by some other way it is not of God” (D&C 50:17–18).

Now let me pick up that last again and give you the antecedent of the pronoun. It said, “If it be by some other way it is not of God” (D&C 50:18).

What is the antecedent of “it”? It is the “word of truth.” That is to say, if you teach the word of truth—now note, you’re saying what is true; everything you say is accurate and right—by some other way than the Spirit, it is not of God. Now what is the other way to teach than by the Spirit? Well, obviously, it is by the power of the intellect.

Suppose I came here tonight and delivered a great message on teaching and did it by the power of the intellect without any of the

Spirit of God attending. Suppose that every word that I said was true, no error whatever, but it was an intellectual presentation. This revelation says, “If it be by some other way it is not of God” (D&C 50:18).

That is, God did not present the message through me because I used the power of the intellect instead of the power of the Spirit. Intellectual things—reason and logic—can do some good, and they can prepare the way, and they can get the mind ready to receive the Spirit under certain circumstances. But conversion comes and the truth sinks into the hearts of people only when it is taught by the power of the Spirit.

“And again, he that receiveth the word of truth, doth he receive it by the Spirit of truth or some other way?” (D&C 50:19).

And the answer is: “If it be some other way it is not of God. Therefore, why is it that ye cannot understand and know, that he that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of truth? Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together” (D&C 50:20–22).

That is how you worship. Real, true, genuine, Spirit-born worship, in a sacrament meeting for instance, comes when a speaker speaks by the power of the Holy Ghost and when a congregation hears by the power of the Holy Ghost. So the speaker gives the word of the Lord, and the congregation receives the word of the Lord. Now that is not the norm, I think, in our sacrament meetings. At least it does not happen anywhere nearly as often as it ought to happen. What happens is this: the congregation comes together in fasting and prayer, pondering the things of the Spirit, desiring to be fed. They bring a gallon jug. The speaker comes in his worldly wisdom, and he brings a little pint bottle, and he pours his pint bottle out, and what he pours rattles around in the gallon jug. Or else, as sometimes happens, the preacher gets his errand from the Lord and gets in tune with the Spirit and comes with a gallon jug to deliver a message, and there is not anybody in the congregation who brought anything bigger than a cup. And he pours out the gallon of eternal truth, and people get just a little sample, enough to quench a moment’s eternal thirst, instead of getting the real message that is involved. It takes teacher and student, it takes preacher and congregation, both of them uniting in faith to have a proper preaching or teaching situation.

I suspect that many of you sometime or other, probably in high school, took a course in physics and had laboratory experiments and used a tuning fork. You remember an occasion when two tuning forks were

selected that were calibrated to the same wavelength, and one of them was set up in one part of the room and the other thirty or forty feet away. Someone struck the first tuning fork, and people put their ear to the second, and it vibrated and made the same sound that came from the first one. This is an illustration. It is what is involved in speaking by the Spirit. Somebody who is in tune with the Spirit speaks words that are heard by the power of the Spirit, where righteous people are concerned.

4. *We are to apply the gospel principles taught to the needs and circumstances of our hearers.* The principles are eternal. They never vary. World conditions and personal problems vary. We apply the divine teachings to the present need. Nephi said, “I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (1 Nephi 19:23).

What he did was quote Isaiah who was talking about the whole house of Israel. And he, Nephi, applied it to the Nephite portion of Israel. Now President Clark says:

Our youth are not children spiritually; they are well on towards the normal spiritual maturity of the world. To treat them as children spiritually, as the world might treat the same age group, is therefore and likewise an anachronism. I say once more there is scarcely a youth that comes through your seminary or institute door who has not been the conscious beneficiary of spiritual blessings, or who has not seen the efficacy of prayer, or who has not witnessed the power of faith to heal the sick, or who has not beheld spiritual outpourings, of which the world at large is today ignorant.<sup>8</sup>

Now, this next expression pleases me to no end.

You do not have to sneak up behind this spiritually experienced youth and whisper religion in his ears; you can come right out, face to face, and talk with him. You do not need to disguise religious truths with a cloak of worldly things; you can bring these truths to him openly, in their natural guise. Youth may prove to be not more fearful of them than you are. There is no need for gradual approaches, for bed-time stories, for coddling, for patronizing, or for any of the other childish devices used in efforts to reach those spiritually inexperienced and all but spiritually dead.<sup>9</sup>

I suppose that has some bearing on games and parties and entertainments and gimmicks that, really, brethren, are poor substitutes for teaching the doctrines of salvation to the students that you have.

5. *We must testify that what we teach is true.*

We are a testimony-bearing people. Everlastingly, we are bearing testimony. You pay particular attention to the testimonies that are

borne in sacrament meeting. A lot of them will just be expressions of thanksgiving or of appreciation for parents or this or that. Sometimes there will be a testimony that says in words that the work is true and that Jesus is the Lord and Joseph Smith is a prophet. And that raises the level. Now I am going to talk about something different from that.

There are two fields in which we are expected to bear testimony, if we perfect our testimony bearing. Of course, we are to bear testimony of the truth and divinity of the work. We are to say that we know by the power of the Holy Spirit that the work is the Lord's, that the kingdom is His. We get a revelation, and it tells us that Jesus is the Lord and Joseph Smith is a prophet, and we ought to say it. That is testimony bearing. But we are obligated also to bear testimony of the truth of the doctrine that we teach, not simply that the work is true, but that we have taught true doctrine, which of course we cannot do unless we have taught by the power of the Spirit.

The fifth chapter of Alma is a very expressive sermon on being born again. Alma teaches the great truths incident to that doctrine in some language and with some expressions that are not found anywhere else in the revelations. And after he has taught his doctrine about being born again, he says this: "For I am called to speak after this manner, according to the holy order of God, which is in Christ Jesus; yea, I am commanded to stand and testify unto this people the things which have been spoken by our fathers concerning the things which are to come" (Alma 5:44).

He is using the scriptures. He is using the revelations that came to the fathers.

"And this is not all. Do ye not suppose that I know of these things myself? Behold, I testify unto you that I do know that these things whereof I have spoken are true" (Alma 5:45).

He's testifying of the truth of the doctrine that he taught.

"And how do ye suppose that I know of their surety? Behold, I say unto you they [the doctrines he has taught] are made known unto me by the Holy Spirit of God. Behold, I have fasted and prayed many days that I might know these things of myself. And now I do know of myself that they are true; for the Lord God hath made them manifest unto me by his Holy Spirit; and this is the spirit of revelation which is in me" (Alma 5:45–46).

The foolishness of teaching! The foolishness of teaching after the manner we have been describing! The teacher's divine commission!

I repeat: I have no power to create a doctrine. I have no power to manufacture a theory or a philosophy or choose a way in which we

must go or a thing we must believe to gain eternal life in our Father's kingdom. I am an agent, a servant, a representative, an ambassador, if you will. I have been called of God to preach what? To preach *His* gospel, not mine. It doesn't matter what I think. The only commission I have is to proclaim *His* word. And if I proclaim *His* word by the power of the Spirit, then everyone involved is bound. People are bound to accept it, or if they reject it, it is at their peril.

Now, my divine commission and your divine commission is (1) to teach the principles of the gospel; (2) to teach them out of the standard works; (3) to teach them by the power of the Holy Ghost; (4) to apply them to the situation at hand; and (5) to bear a personal witness, a witness born of the Spirit, that the doctrine that is taught is true. That is the teacher's divine commission.

I do not always measure up to that by any means. I guess the Brethren, of whom I am one, do as much preaching and speaking in Church congregations as anyone, unless it is the seminary and institute teachers. There are times when I struggle and strive to get a message over and just do not seem to myself to be getting in tune with the Spirit. The fact is, it is a lot harder for me to choose what ought to be said, what subject ought to be considered, than it is for me to get up and preach it. I am always struggling and trying to get the inspiration to know what ought to be said at general conference or in a stake conference or whatever. If we labor at it and if we struggle, the Spirit will be given by the prayer of faith. If we do our part, we will improve and grow in the things of the Spirit until we get to a position where we can, being in tune, say what the Lord wants said. That is what is expected of us. And that is foolishness in the eyes of the world, in the disciplines of science and sociology and so on. But it is the foolishness of God, and the foolishness of God, which is wiser than men, is what brings salvation.

Let me say just a word about false doctrine. We are supposed to teach. Pitfalls we are supposed to avoid are the teaching of false doctrine: teaching ethics in preference to doctrine, compromising our doctrines with the philosophies of the world, entertaining rather than teaching, and using games and gimmicks rather than sound doctrine, coddling students, as President Clark expressed it.

We ought to judge everything by gospel standards, not the reverse. Do not take a scientific principle, so-called, and try to make the gospel conform to it. Take the gospel for what it is, and, insofar as you can, make other things conform to it, and if they do not conform to it, forget them. Forget them; do not worry. They will vanish away eventu-

ally. In the true sense of the word, the gospel embraces all truth. And everything that is true is going to conform to the principles that God has revealed.

“O the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up in the pride of their hearts, and all those who preach false doctrines, and all those who commit whoredoms, and pervert the right way of the Lord, wo, wo, wo be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell!” (2 Nephi 28:15).

I shall repeat the portion of that that deals with teaching. “Those who preach false doctrines, . . . wo, wo, wo be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell!” (2 Nephi 28:15).

I want to say something about this. That scripture is talking about people who have a form of godliness, as Paul expressed it, but who deny the power thereof (see 2 Timothy 3:5). And the Lord quoted Paul in the First Vision, using his very language. He is talking about those people of whom Paul said, they are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). President Clark said:

You are not to teach the philosophies of the world, ancient or modern, pagan or Christian, for this is the field of the public schools. Your sole field is the Gospel, and that is boundless in its own sphere.

We pay taxes to support those state institutions whose function and work it is to teach the arts, the sciences, literature, history, the languages, and so on through the whole secular curriculum. These institutions are to do this work. But we use the tithes of the Church to carry on the Church school system, and these are impressed with a holy trust. The Church seminaries and institutes are to teach the Gospel.<sup>10</sup>

You talk about teaching false doctrine and being damned. Here is a list of false doctrines that if someone teaches he will be damned. And there is not one of these that I have ever known to be taught in the Church, but I am giving you the list for a perspective because of what will follow. Teach that God is a spirit, the sectarian trinity. Teach that salvation comes by grace alone, without works. Teach original guilt, or birth sin, as they express it. Teach infant baptism. Teach predestination. Teach that revelation and gifts and miracles have ceased. Teach the Adam-God theory. (That does apply in the Church.) Teach that we should practice plural marriage today. Now any of those are doctrines that damn. They are what I just read about from 2 Nephi 28.

Now here are some doctrines that weaken faith and may damn. It depends on how inured a person gets to them, and how much emphasis he puts on them, and how much the doctrine begins to govern the affairs

of his life. Evolution is one of them. Somebody can get so wrapped up in so-called organic evolution that he ends up not believing in the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. Such a course leads to damnation.

Somebody can teach that God is progressing in knowledge. And if he begins to believe it, and emphasizes it unduly, and it becomes a ruling thing in his life, then, as the Lectures on Faith say, it is not possible for him to have faith unto life and salvation. He is required to believe, in the Prophet's language, that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, that He has all power and He knows all things.

If you teach a doctrine that there is a second chance for salvation, you may lose your soul. You will if you believe that doctrine to the point that you do not live right and if you go on the assumption that someday you will have the opportunity for salvation even though you did not keep the commandments here.

And so it is with the paradisiacal creation, with progression from one degree of glory to another, with figuring out what the beasts in the book of Revelation are about or the mysteries in any field. Or maybe you will get talking about the fact that the sons of perdition are not resurrected or where the ten tribes are. Or perhaps you will make a mistake on the true doctrine of the gathering of Israel or some of the events incident to the Second Coming or millennial events and the like.

Now I am not saying that those doctrines will damn in the sense that the first list that I read *will*, but they *may*. They certainly will lead people astray, and they will keep you from perfecting the kind of faith that will enable you to do good and work righteousness and perform miracles. I do not get very troubled about an honest and sincere person who makes a mistake in doctrine, provided that it is a mistake of the intellect or a mistake of understanding and provided it is not on a great basic and fundamental principle. If he makes a mistake on the atoning sacrifice of Christ, he will go down to destruction. But if he errs in a lesser way—in a nonmalignant way, if you will—he can still straighten himself out without too much trouble. The Prophet Joseph Smith tells us of an experience he had with a man by the name of Brown in the early days. This man was taken before the high council for teaching false doctrine. He had been explaining the beasts in the book of Revelation. And he came to the Prophet, and the Prophet, with him present in the congregation, then preached a sermon on the subject, and in fact told us what the beasts mean. In the sermon, he said: "I did not like the old man being called up for erring in doctrine. It looks too much like the Methodist, and not like the Latter-day Saints. Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be asked out of their church. I want the

liberty of thinking and believing as I please. It feels so good not to be trammelled. It does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine.”<sup>11</sup>

That statement applies to doctrines of the lesser sort. If you err in some doctrines, and I have, and all of us have, what we want to do is get the further light and knowledge that we ought to receive and get our souls in tune and clarify our thinking. Now, obviously if you preach one of these great basic doctrines and it is false and you adhere to it, you will lose your soul. You know the Book of Mormon account says that a man goes to hell if he dies believing in infant baptism. Well, he *is* denying the atoning sacrifice of Christ and the goodness of God and the salvation of men if he supposes that infant baptism is needed. It is my hope, obviously, that we will teach sound, true doctrine. And we shall do that if we confine ourselves to the scriptures and if we leave the mysteries alone.

### Testimony

The marvelous and wondrous thing about this work that we are engaged in is the simple fact that it is true. There is not anything you can imagine or conceive in your heart that is more glorious than the simple fact that the work we are engaged in is true. This is the Lord’s work. This is the kingdom of God on earth, and He has issued the eternal decree that the work is going to roll on until it covers the earth, until the knowledge of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea. That will happen because it is true, and truth will prevail. That is the ultimate destiny of the kingdom. And we shall have peace and joy and happiness if we stay with the kingdom, believe its principles, and live its laws.

In addition to the fact that the kingdom is true, the doctrine I have been teaching tonight is true. The points that I have made under the heading “The Teacher’s Divine Commission” are true. If we can conform to them and follow them, we shall rise to a standard of teaching that will change the lives of people. You do not change anybody’s life by teaching him mathematics, but as President Brigham Young told Karl G. Maeser, he was not even to teach the multiplication tables except by the Spirit of God. That is a lesser thing. But you do change the lives of people when you teach them the doctrines of salvation.

“It [pleases] God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Corinthians 1:21).

We save ourselves by our teaching, and we save those who will get

in tune with the same Spirit that we have, when we teach those truths. What a glorious and wondrous thing it is not to have to worry about the doctrines of the kingdom, not to have to defend them and support them and uphold them. They are true, and they sustain and defend and uphold themselves. And they do it because the work is true. God be praised that we have the truths of salvation and that we are members of His kingdom, the Church and kingdom of God on earth. I thank Him for this blessing, and I do it for myself, and I act as mouth for all of you on this occasion, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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## Notes

1. J. Reuben Clark Jr., *The Charted Course of the Church in Education* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), 10.

2. See Conference Report, April 1981, 104.

3. See Fred Esplin, "The Saints Go Marching On: Learning to Live with Success," *Utah Holiday*, June 1981, 47.

4. Clark, *Charted Course*, 5–6.

5. Clark, *Charted Course*, 6.

6. Clark, *Charted Course*, 6–7.

7. Clark, *Charted Course*, 10–11.

8. Clark, *Charted Course*, 10.

9. Clark, *Charted Course*, 10.

10. Clark, *Charted Course*, 11.

11. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 5:340.