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Photo by Christine Langer-Pueschel

The Fifth Principle of the Gospel

NOEL B. REYNOLDS

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For several generations, Latter-day Saint discourse has privileged four basic principles and ordinances of the gospel. In 2004, however, the historic introduction of a comprehensive missionary handbook featured five principles and ordinances in its lesson on the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹ This was followed in 2010 with a revised handbook for Church leaders which, under the heading “The Gospel of Jesus Christ,” lists the same five principles:²

1. Faith in Jesus Christ
2. Repentance
3. Baptism of water
4. The gift of the Holy Ghost
5. Enduring to the end

This quintet of basic principles now appears to be systematically reflected in all curricular materials produced by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The fifth principle seems to have been introduced without any fanfare or even notice.

While scholarly discussion of this fifth principle in Latter-day Saint circles goes back to at least 1991,³ members for over a century have relied

Enduring to the end appears to correspond to the lifelong task of walking up this strait and narrow path until one qualifies for eternal life.

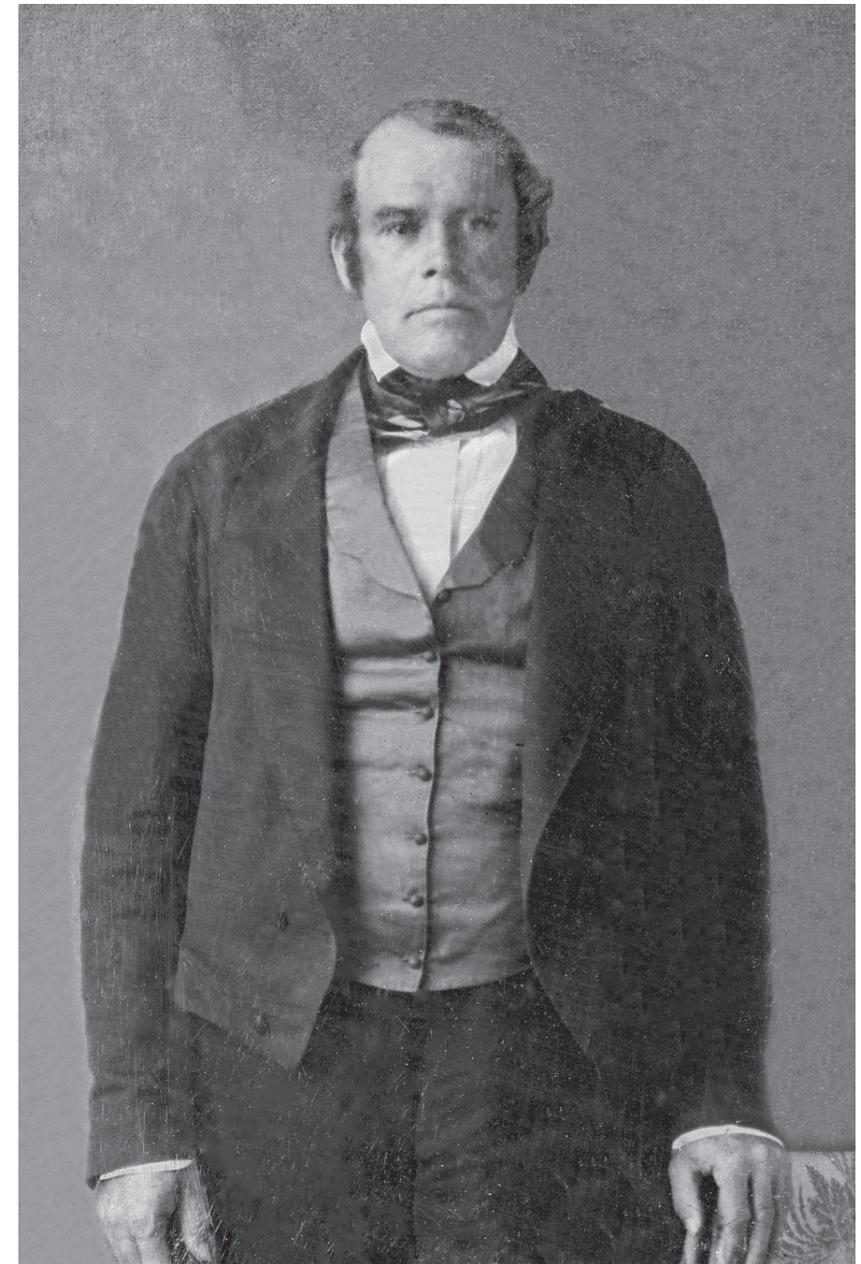
almost universally on the statement of four basic principles and ordinances in the fourth article of faith, first articulated in Joseph Smith's 1842 letter to Illinois editor and politician John Wentworth, for an account of "the laws and ordinances of the gospel": "We believe that these ordinances are: 1st, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; 2d, Repentance; 3d, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; 4th, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost."⁴

Early Mormon Sources for the Fourth Article of Faith

Long before the writing of the Wentworth Letter, early Mormon missionaries, as documented by David J. Whittaker, often used these kinds of summary statements to explain the Latter-day Saint message.⁵ Whittaker found that these statements could be shared with local newspapers and published on broadsides when missionaries entered into new areas to facilitate their engagement with local populations. For the first decade, the revelation now known as section 20 of the Doctrine and Covenants (at that time known as the "Articles and Covenants" of the Church) was used most frequently in this way. But over time, various missionaries composed their own, more analytic statements.

One of the earliest of these, apparently composed by Brigham Young's brother Joseph in 1836, was published in a Boston compilation of American religious creeds and clearly acknowledged the Book of Mormon requirement that Christ's followers endure to the end: "to ensure eternal life, a strict obedience to all the commandments of God, must be observed, to the end."⁶ Most influential were the writings of Parley P. Pratt. His 1840 *Late Persecution of the Church* included earlier material, but featured a new introduction enumerating and briefly explaining five principles of "Theology held by this Church." The first four of these are preserved in the current fourth article of faith. In elaborating on the fourth principle, Pratt lists all the duties incumbent on a new Church member: "in short, to continue faithful unto the end, in all the duties which are enjoined by the Law of Christ."⁷

When Parley extracted a four-page version of these principles a month later in what has been called "the first short tract outlining the fundamentals of Mormonism,"⁸ he again followed up on the four basic "conditions of the gospel," citing Acts 2:38, with a paragraph listing all the ways in which these converts must conduct their lives "to walk in all the ordinances of God blameless" and "to keep themselves unspotted from the world"—but this time without any direct mention of the Book of Mormon language of continuing



Parley P. Pratt's writings in his 1840 *Late Persecution of the Church* featured a new introduction explaining five principles of "Theology held by this Church." Pratt lists all the duties required of a new Church member, including the charge to "continue faithful unto the end."

faithful to the end.⁹ Similarly, in the same year, his brother Orson listed the same four “first conditions of the gospel” in an 1840 pamphlet he published in Edinburgh and then went on, like Joseph Young and Parley, to add explicitly that it is necessary “to continue faithful to the end, in all the duties enjoined upon them by the word and spirit of Christ.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, these fivefold formulations did not gain much traction among other early Mormon writers. It seems probable that these writers did not actually recognize enduring to the end as a separate principle—even though they always included it conceptually in their expositions of the restored gospel and typically used Book of Mormon phraseology to do so.

Eventually the thirteen affirmations of belief from the Wentworth Letter of 1842 were excerpted by Franklin D. Richards and included in his 1851 “Pearl of Great Price” as “Articles of Faith,” and received canonical status in a vote of the 1880 general conference of the Church. While enduring to the end was not recognized therein as a basic gospel principle in article 4, it did receive a mention in article 13: “We have endured many things, and we hope to be able to endure all things.”

Although a tradition developed later crediting Joseph Smith with direct authorship of the thirteen Articles of Faith, they clearly represent an evolution from the prior decade’s efforts of various Latter-day Saint writers. They seem likely to have received their final or near-final form at the hand of Orson Pratt, who continued rewriting and reformulating them in successive years.¹¹ Joseph Smith had consistently maintained an anti-creedal position, and seems never to have referred to these thirteen articles in his own speaking and writing for Latter-day Saint audiences.¹² In compiling these lists of teachings, Orson Pratt and others were drawing extensively on the earlier pamphlet-writing efforts of Parley P. Pratt “phrases from which are echoed in the later ‘Articles of Faith.’”¹³

Book of Mormon Origins in the Teachings of Christ

The significantly intensified study of the Book of Mormon over the last four decades has contributed directly to this development in doctrinal understanding.¹⁴ In three clearly delineated passages in the Book of Mormon, Jesus Christ personally teaches his gospel and doctrine to one or more Nephites. In each one he emphasizes in different ways the necessity of enduring to the end.¹⁵ It may be helpful to describe each of these passages briefly as a basis for the following discussion.

2 Nephi 31

In 2 Nephi 31:3–21, Nephi provides a nineteen-verse expansion of 1 Nephi 11:27, in which he had given a brief description of the baptism of Jesus as he had seen it in vision. In this expanded version we learn that Nephi had saved perhaps the most spectacular part of that early vision to use as a conclusion to his doctrinal writings. We now learn that in this segment of the early vision, Nephi (and presumably Lehi before him) was taught the basic principles of the gospel or doctrine of Christ by the Father and the Son directly. He quotes each of them three times. Perhaps because of the way Nephi has separated this detailed account from his earlier account of the vision, most readers seem to miss the significance of Nephi’s experience as reported in 2 Nephi 31.

In verse 14, Nephi quotes the Son as saying that if, after a person has repented, been baptized, and received the blessings of the Holy Ghost he or she should then deny Jesus, “it would have been better for [that person if he or she] had not known me.” At this point in Nephi’s rehearsal of this experience, the Father intervenes to affirm and reformulate the point: “He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved” (2 Nephi 31:15), giving us the principal form of language that is used throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon. Recognizing the supreme authority of the speaker, Nephi immediately states his own understanding of this principle as a basic gospel requirement: “I know by this that unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved” (2 Nephi 31:16).

At this point, Nephi introduces a powerful visual image—possibly original with him—to help readers understand the complete gospel process. He describes an entry gate that opens onto a straight and narrow path that leads to eternal life. Then he tells us that “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” (2 Nephi 31:17). The remaining principle, enduring to the end, appears to correspond to the lifelong task of walking up this straight¹⁶ and narrow path until one qualifies for eternal life (v. 18). It also becomes clear that Nephi sees this divine bestowal of the Holy Ghost as an essential requirement for all Christ’s followers in the process of enduring to the end. Not only does it bring the remission of sins, but it also provides a “witness of the Father and the Son,” and shows us “all things what [we] should do” (2 Nephi 31:18, 32:5).

The next two verses bring the focus down to this fifth principle by asking rhetorically if getting “into this straight and narrow path” is sufficient for

salvation. The answer is clearly negative. The convert must now “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ”—the same “unshaken faith in him” that has brought him or her to this point. Combined with “a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men,” one can press forward on the path, “endure to the end,” and receive eternal life (2 Nephi 31:19–20). Enduring to the end is described here as living in faith, hope, and charity; as following the Holy Ghost in all things; and, in the Father’s own words, as the way to eternal life.

3 Nephi 11–15

The same five basic principles of the gospel are delineated for the Nephites by Jesus when he first appears to them, as reported by Mormon in 3 Nephi 11. In this chapter, we have the first four principles presented and repeated, but without any direct reference to the fifth principle—enduring to the end (3 Nephi 11:31–39). Instead, we get the Book of Mormon version of the Sermon on the Mount, presented as a teaching on the way that those who have been baptized and have received the Holy Ghost should live their lives. Our suspicion is that this presentation in chapters 12–14 should be understood as a discourse on enduring to the end, which is powerfully confirmed at the end, when the rhetorical tension is resolved as Jesus announces the fifth principle twice for emphasis: “Behold, I am the law, and the light. Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life” (3 Nephi 15:9).

3 Nephi 27:13–22

In this final presentation of his gospel to his Nephite disciples, Jesus focuses on the judgment and the necessity of enduring to the end for all those who receive his gospel if they will “be lifted up at the last day” (3 Nephi 27:22). The point is made three times that those who follow Jesus by believing in him, repenting, and being baptized will be filled with the Holy Ghost. But then they will be judged by him. Three times it is stressed that they will be judged according to their works. As in 2 Nephi 31:14, those who do not endure to the end will be “hewn down and cast into the fire” (3 Nephi 27:17). Enduring to the end is also termed “faithfulness unto the end” (v. 19).

Other Book of Mormon Prophets

Throughout the Book of Mormon, this understanding that only those who have endured faithfully in keeping the commandments of God will receive eternal life is consistently maintained. Contrary to teachings promoted throughout much of Christian history, neither a profound spiritual experience nor the reception of required ordinances will be sufficient. A sampling of the teachings of Nephite prophets at different points in time makes this clear.

Nephi

“And blessed are they who shall seek to bring forth my Zion at that day, for they shall have the gift and the power of the Holy Ghost; and if they endure unto the end they shall be lifted up at the last day, and shall be saved in the everlasting kingdom of the Lamb” (1 Nephi 13:37).

“For none of these can I hope except they shall be reconciled unto Christ, and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the strait path which leads to life, and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation” (2 Nephi 33:9; see also v. 4).

Jacob

“And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned” (2 Nephi 9:24; see also v. 18).

“Then, my beloved brethren, repent ye, and enter in at the strait gate, and continue in the way which is narrow, until ye shall obtain eternal life” (Jacob 6:11).

Omni

“Yea, come unto him, and offer your whole souls as an offering unto him, and continue in fasting and praying, and endure to the end; and as the Lord liveth ye will be saved” (Omni 1:26).

King Benjamin

“Thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord, and should be diligent in keeping his commandments, and continue in the faith even unto the end of his life” (Mosiah 4:6).

Alma₁

“Ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body” (Mosiah 18:13).

Alma₂

“And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved” (Alma 5:13).

“And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth . . . he shall have eternal life” (7:16; see also vv. 23–25).

“Having faith on the Lord; having a hope that ye shall receive eternal life; having the love of God always in your hearts, that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into his rest” (13:29).

“Yea, he that truly humbleth himself, and repenteth of his sins, and endureth to the end, the same shall be blessed” (32:15).

“Because of your steadiness and your faithfulness unto God; for as you have commenced in your youth to look to the Lord your God, even so I hope that you will continue in keeping his commandments; for blessed is he that endureth to the end” (38:2).

“If he hath repented of his sins, and desired righteousness until the end of his days, even so he shall be rewarded unto righteousness” (Alma 41:6, cf. v. 14).

Mormon

“And if ye do this, and endure to the end, ye will in nowise be cast out” (Mormon 9:29).

“Which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God” (Moroni 8:26).

Moroni

“And blessed is he that is found faithful unto my name at the last day, for he shall be lifted up to dwell in the kingdom prepared for him from the foundation of the world” (Ether 4:19).

“But that they may be persuaded to do good continually, that they may come unto the fountain of all righteousness and be saved” (Ether 8:26).

Moroni goes on to cite the practices of the Nephite church. A priesthood ordination used this language: “I ordain you to be a priest . . . to preach repentance and remission of sins through Jesus Christ, by the endurance of faith on his name to the end” (Moroni 3:3). He also included this requirement for baptismal candidates: “And none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end” (6:3). He also taught “that he, through his infinite goodness and grace, will keep you through the endurance of faith on his name to the end” (8:3). Also, “for they die in their sins, and they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God” (10:26). A thousand years after the great vision given to Lehi and Nephi gave them the language of enduring to the end, it was still in prominent use by the Nephite church and prophets.

Enduring to the End in the Bible

While the language of enduring to the end does occur in the New Testament, the concept shows up more often in other forms. In Matthew 10:22 (see also Matthew 24:13, Mark 13:13) Jesus warns his disciples that they “shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.” Less clearly, we can see the principle underlying other language. A few examples from the gospels might include the following.

“Narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life” (Matthew 7:14).

“Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 7:19; see also Luke 3:9).

“And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:38; see also Mark 8:34–35).

“If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

“Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21).

“No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

While these examples and numerous others demonstrate clear continuity between the teaching of Christ’s gospel to his contemporaries in Palestine and to the Nephites, the principle of enduring to the end has not been consistently included or emphasized by Christian theologians as it was by Nephite prophets.

Preach My Gospel

In his recent history of *Preach My Gospel*, Benjamin White briefly mentioned the inclusion of enduring to the end in the third lesson (on the gospel of Jesus Christ); however, he does not seem to notice that this is a significant expansion of the traditional definition, nor does he offer any account of the reasoning behind this change.¹⁷ We do know that *Preach My Gospel* was the outcome of a lengthy process overseen closely by Elder M. Russell Ballard because of his assignment to preside over the Missionary Executive Committee in those years. Through the good offices of Elder M. Russell Ballard, I have obtained some additional explanation from the Missionary Department for this 2005 expansion. Primary and extensive attention was given first to the task of formulating the missionary's purpose: to "invite others to come unto Christ by helping them receive the restored gospel through faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement, repentance, baptism, receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end."¹⁸ The presentations of Christ's gospel in 2 Nephi 31 and 3 Nephi 27 provided the basis for this formulation—with an eye to the requirement in Doctrine and Covenants 20:37 that baptismal candidates manifest "a determination to serve him to the end."¹⁹ We now see clearly that the consistent inclusion of this principle in authoritative Book of Mormon presentations of the gospel played a key role in the process that led to this expansion of traditional approaches based on the fourth article of faith.

Notes

1. See *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004), 60–70.
2. See *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 2.2.1.
3. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies* 31, no. 3 (1991): 31–50; and "Gospel of Jesus Christ," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:556–60.
4. *Joseph Smith Papers: Histories, vol. 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, ed. Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2012), 1:500.
5. David J. Whittaker, "The 'Articles of Faith' in Early Mormon Literature and Thought," in *New Views of Mormon History*, ed. Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 63–92.
6. Joseph Young, as cited in John Hayward, *The Religious Creeds and Statutes of Every Christian Denomination in the United States and British Provinces* (Boston: John Hayward, 1836), 139–40; see the discussion in Whittaker, "Articles of Faith," 68–69.

7. Parley P. Pratt, *Late Persecution of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints . . . with a Sketch of their Rise, Progress and Doctrine* (New York, 1840), v, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/2825>; see also Whittaker, "Articles of Faith," 70.
8. Peter Crawley, "Parley P. Pratt: Father of Mormon Pamphleteering," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 16.
9. See Parley P. Pratt, *An Address by Judge Higbee and Parley P. Pratt . . . to the Citizens of Washington and to the Public in General*, 2–3, <https://archive.org/details/addressbyjudgehigbee>.
10. See "A Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions," now available as an appendix in *Joseph Smith Papers: Histories*, 1:543–44, available at <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/church-history-1-march-1842?p=1>.
11. A more recent and detailed explanation of likely sources for the Wentworth Letter and its thirteen articles of faith is now available in the "Historical Introduction" to Orson Pratt's "A Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions." The editors helpfully highlight the passages in Orson Pratt's 1840 Edinburgh publication that appear to be the immediate sources for the thirteen articles of faith listed in the 1842 Wentworth Letter. See pp. 520–46.
12. Whittaker, "Articles of Faith," 77.
13. See Whittaker, "Articles of Faith," 69–74, where Whittaker refers specifically to the revised introduction in the 1840 version of *Late Persecutions of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*. For a more detailed discussion of P. Pratt's early formulations, see Terry L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow, *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 171–73.
14. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (Spring 1999), 6–47, for an account of the emergence of this revised focus in Latter-day Saint scripture study.
15. For a brief analysis of these three passages, see Noel B. Reynolds, "This Is the Way," *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 72–74. A much longer and more technical discussion will be found in Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel According to Mormon," *Scottish Theological Journal*, forthcoming.
16. I follow the critical text of Royal Skousen in preferring straight to strait in 2 Nephi 31:18–19. See Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 151. The full explanation for this choice is published in Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part One, 1 Nephi 1–2 Nephi 10* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2005), 174–81.
17. Benjamin Hyrum White, "The History of *Preach My Gospel*," *Religious Educator* 14, no. 1 (2013): 146–47. White's master's thesis includes a visual used by an earlier Missionary Executive Committee in 2001 that was already listing "enduring to the end" as a fifth gospel principle, but there is no discussion of how it was decided to include it. "A Historical Analysis of How *Preach My Gospel* Came to Be" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 2010), 31.
18. *Preach My Gospel*, 1.
19. Aaron Jenne to M. Russell Ballard, e-mail dated July 30, 2014, and forwarded to me by Elder Ballard on August 15, 2014.