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Our Relationship with the Lord

BRUCE R. MCCONKIE

I shall speak of our relationship with the Lord and of the true fellowship all Saints should have with the Father. I shall set forth what we must believe relative to the Father and the Son in order to gain eternal life.

I shall expound the doctrine of the Church relative to what our relationship should be to all members of the Godhead and do so in plainness and simplicity so that none need misunderstand or be led astray by other voices.

I shall express the view of the Brethren, of the prophets and apostles of old, and of all those who understand the scriptures and are in tune with the Holy Spirit.

These matters lie at the very foundation of revealed religion. In presenting them I am on my own ground and am at home with my subject. I shall not stoop to petty wranglings about semantics but shall stay with matters of substance. I shall simply go back to basics and set forth fundamental doctrines of the kingdom, knowing that everyone who is sound spiritually and who has the guidance of the Holy Spirit will believe my words and follow my counsel.

Please do not put too much stock in some of the current views and vagaries that are afloat, but rather, turn to the revealed word, get a sound understanding of the doctrines,

and keep yourselves in the mainstream of the Church.

Now, it is no secret that many false and vain and foolish things are being taught in the sectarian world and even among us about our need to gain a special relationship with the Lord Jesus. I shall summarize the true doctrine in this field and invite erring teachers and beguiled students to repent and believe the accepted gospel verities as I shall set them forth.

There is no salvation in believing any false doctrine, particularly a false or unwise view about the Godhead or any of its members. Eternal life is reserved for those who know God and the One whom he sent to work out the infinite and eternal atonement.

True and saving worship is found only among those who know the truth about God and the Godhead and who understand the true relationship men should have with each member of that Eternal Presidency.

Bruce R. McConkie was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this devotional address was given at Brigham Young University on 2 March 1982.

It follows that the devil would rather spread false doctrine about God and the Godhead, and induce false feelings with reference to any one of them, than almost any other thing he could do. The creeds of Christendom illustrate perfectly what Lucifer wants so-called Christian people to believe about Deity in order to be damned.

These creeds codify what Jeremiah calls the lies about God (see Jeremiah 16:19; 23:14–32). They say he is unknown, uncreated, and incomprehensible. They say he is a spirit, without body, parts, or passions. They say he is everywhere and nowhere in particular present, that he fills the immensity of space and yet dwells in the hearts of men, and that he is an immaterial, incorporeal nothingness. They say he is one-god-in-three, and three-gods-in-one who neither hears, nor sees, nor speaks. Some even say he is dead, which he might as well be if their descriptions identify his being.

These concepts summarize the chief and greatest heresy of Christendom. Truly the most grievous and evil heresy ever imposed on an erring and wayward Christianity is their creedal concept about God and the Godhead! But none of this troubles us very much. God has revealed himself to us in this day even as he did to the prophets of old.

We know thereby that he is a personal Being in whose image man was made. We know that he has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; that he is a resurrected, glorified, and perfected Being; and that he lives in the family unit. We know that we are his spirit children; that he endowed us with the divine gift of agency; and that he ordained the laws whereby we might advance and progress and become like him.

We know that God is the only supreme and independent Being in whom all fullness and perfection dwell and that he is omnipotent, omniscient, and, by the power of his Spirit, omnipresent.

We know “the Almighty God gave his Only Begotten Son” (D&C 20:21), as the scriptures attest, to ransom man from the temporal and spiritual death brought into the world by the fall of Adam and to put into operation all of the terms and conditions of the Father's plan.

We know that the Holy Ghost, as a “personage of Spirit,” is both a Revelator and a Sanctifier and that his chief mission is to bear record of the Father and the Son.

Thus there are, in the Eternal Godhead, three persons—God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer; and God the third, the Testator. These three are one—one God if you will—in purposes, in powers, and in perfections. But each has his own severable work to perform, and mankind has a defined and known and specific relationship to each one of them. It is of these relationships that we shall now speak.

Doctrines of Eternal Life

Let us set forth those doctrines and concepts that a gracious God has given to us in this day and which must be understood in order to gain eternal life. They are:

1. We worship the Father and him only and no one else.

We do not worship the Son, and we do not worship the Holy Ghost. I know perfectly well what the scriptures say about worshipping Christ and Jehovah, but they are speaking in an entirely different sense—the sense of standing in awe and being reverentially grateful to him who has redeemed us. Worship in the true and saving sense is reserved for God the first, the Creator.

Our revelations say that the Father “is infinite and eternal,” that he created “man, male and female,”

And gave unto them commandments that they should love and serve him, the only living and true

God, and that he should be the only being whom they should worship. [D&C 20:17–19]

Jesus said:

True worshippers shall [note that this is mandatory] worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

For unto such hath God promised his Spirit. And they who worship him, must worship in spirit and in truth. [JST John 4:25–26]

There is no other way, no other approved system of worship.

2. We love and serve both the Father and the Son.

In the full, final, and ultimate sense of the word the divine decree is:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, mind, and strength; and in the name of Jesus Christ thou shalt serve him. [D&C 59:5]

And Jesus also said:

If ye love me, keep my commandments. [John 14:15]

These, then, are the commandments of commandments. They tie the Father and the Son together, as one, so that both receive our love and service.

3. Christ himself loves, serves, and worships the Father.

Though Christ is God, yet there is a Deity above him, a Deity whom he worships. That God is the Father. To Mary Magdalene, the first mortal to see a resurrected person, Jesus said:

I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. [John 20:17]

All of us, Christ included, are the spirit children of the Father; all of us, Christ included, seek to become like the Father. In this sense the Firstborn, our Elder Brother, goes forward as we do.

4. The plan of salvation is the gospel of the Father

The plan of salvation originated with the Father; he is the Author and Finisher of our faith in the final sense; he ordained the laws by obedience to which both we and Christ can become like him.

The Father did *not* ask for volunteers to propose a plan whereby man might be saved. What he did was ask whom he should send to be the Redeemer in the plan he devised. Christ and Lucifer both volunteered, and the Lord chose his Firstborn and rejected the amendatory offer of the son of the morning.

Thus Paul spoke of “the gospel of God, . . . concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Romans 1:1–3). It is the Father’s gospel, it became the gospel of the Son by adoption, and we call it after Christ’s name because his atoning sacrifice put all of its terms and conditions into operation.

5. Christ worked out his own salvation by worshipping the Father.

After the Firstborn of the Father, while yet a spirit being, had gained power and intelligence that made him like unto God; after he had become, under the Father, the Creator of worlds without number; after he had reigned on the throne of eternal power as the Lord Omnipotent—after all this he yet had to gain a mortal and then an immortal body.

After the Son of God “made flesh” his “tabernacle,” and while he “dwelt among the sons of men”; after he left his preexistent glory as we all do at birth; after he was born of Mary in Bethlehem of Judea—after all this he was called upon to work out his own salvation.

Of our Lord's life while in this mortal probation the scripture says:

He received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace;

And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness.

Finally, after his resurrection,

he received a fulness of the glory of the Father;

And he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him. [D&C 93:12–14, 16–17]

Note it, please, the Lord Jesus worked out his own salvation while in this mortal probation by going from grace to grace, until, having overcome the world and being raised in immortal glory, he became like the Father in the full, complete, and eternal sense.

6. All men must worship the Father in the same way Christ did in order to gain salvation.

Thus spake the Lord: "I give unto you these sayings"—those we have just quoted which tell how Christ gained his salvation by worshipping the Father—

I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness.

What a wondrous concept this is! We too can become like the Father,

For if you keep my commandments, the Lord continued, you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace. [D&C 93:19–20; emphasis added]

7. The Father sent the Son to work out the infinite and eternal atonement.

As temporal and spiritual death came by the fall of Adam, so immortality and eternal life come by the atonement of Christ. Such was and is and ever shall be the plan of the Father. Adam was sent to earth to fall, and Christ came to ransom men from the fall.

Thus the Father sent forth this call in the councils of eternity: "Whom shall I send to be my Son, to ransom all people from temporal and spiritual death, to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man, to put into full operation all the terms and conditions of my eternal plan of redemption and salvation?"

Christ is the Redeemer of men and the Savior of the world because his Father sent him and gave him power to do the assigned work. He said he had power to lay down his life and to take it again because he had been so commanded by the Father. Lehi said he rose from the dead "by the power of the Spirit" (2 Nephi 2:8).

The great and eternal redemption, in all its phases, was wrought by Christ using the power of the Father.

8. The Son came to do the will of the Father in all things.

Jesus said:

I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. [John 6:38]

Also:

I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me. And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross. [3 Nephi 27:13–14]

And Paul said of him that he

made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. [Philippians 2:7–8]

How better could his relationship with his Father be stated?

9. God, through Christ, is reconciling men to himself.

Fallen man is carnal, sensual, and devilish by nature; he is spiritually dead; he is out of harmony with the Father.

Thus, as Paul said,

All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.

We have the “word of reconciliation,” which is the gospel, and our preaching is, “Be ye reconciled to God,” that is, to the Father (2 Corinthians 5:18–20).

10. Christ is the Mediator between God and man.

Because all people must be reconciled to God in order to be saved, he, in his goodness and grace, has provided a Mediator for them.

Paul told us:

There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. [1 Timothy 2:5–6]

To this we add: If there were no Mediator, we could never be reconciled to the Father, and hence there would be no salvation.

11. Christ is our Intercessor with the Father, our Advocate in the courts above.

In the process of mediating between us and our Maker, in the process of reconciling sin-

ridden men with a sin-free God, Christ makes intercession for all who repent. He advocates the cause of those who believe in him. “Father,” he pleads,

spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life. [D&C 45:5]

12. Our eternal fellowship is with the Father and the Son.

John wrote:

Our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. [1 John 1:3]

If we keep the commandments, “we have fellowship” with the Father—which is the object and end of our existence. And in the very nature of things we also have eternal fellowship with Christ, because he walked in the light and became and is one with the Father. (see 1 John 1:4–7).

13. God was in Christ manifesting himself to the world.

The Son, Paul told us, is in “the express image of his [Father’s] person” (Hebrews 1:3). “I and my Father are one,” Jesus said (John 10:30). Thus in his appearance, in his person, and in his attributes, the Son is the image and likeness of the Father. “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,” Jesus said (John 14:9). The four gospels are a treasure house of knowledge concerning the Father because they set forth what the Son is like, and he is like his Father.

14. Christ is the Revealer of the Father

God is and can be known only by revelation; he stands revealed or he remains forever unknown. Jesus said:

No man knoweth . . . who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him. [Luke 10:22]

15. Christ is the Way to the Father.

“I am the way,” he said. “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

Who can doubt that Christ’s mission is to reveal the Father, to lead us to the Father, to teach us how to worship the Father, to reconcile us to the Father?

16. Christ proclaims the gospel of the Father.

In the ultimate sense the word of salvation comes from the Father. Said Paul,

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son. [Hebrews 1:1]

The Father sent the prophets; they represented him; and they spoke his word. When Jesus quoted the Old Testament prophets to the Nephites, he attributed their words to the Father.

Though the revelations came from the Son, yet in the ultimate sense the truths taught were those of the Father. We are also aware of many instances in which Jesus, acting by divine investiture of authority, speaks in the first person as though he were the Father.

Thus Jesus said:

My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. [John 7:16–17]

17. Christ glorifies the Father and so must we.

“Glorify thy Son,” Jesus prayed to the Father,

that thy Son also may glorify thee. . . .

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. [John 17:1, 4]

As Christ our Pattern, by obedience and by doing his appointed labors, glorified the Father, so must we. Acting in his Father’s name, Jesus ascribed the honor and glory in all things to the Father. The very pattern of prayer that he gave us directs that we go and do likewise.

Now, we might continue on and list added concepts, all of which would bear the same witness and accord with what we have said. Let us instead, on the basis of these present concepts, discuss the problem at hand and draw some conclusions.

Our Relationship to Members of the Godhead

What is and should be our relationship to the members of the Godhead?

First, be it remembered that most scriptures that speak of God or of the Lord do not even bother to distinguish the Father from the Son, simply because it doesn’t make any difference which God is involved. They are one. The words or deeds of either of them would be the words and deeds of the other in the same circumstance.

Further, if a revelation comes from, or by the power of the Holy Ghost, ordinarily the words will be those of the Son, though what the Son says will be what the Father would say, and the words may thus be considered as the Father’s. Thus any feelings of love, praise, awe, or worship that may fill our hearts when we receive the divine words will be the same no matter who is thought or known to be the author of them.

And yet we do have a proper relationship to each member of the Godhead, in part at least because there are separate and severable functions which each performs, and also because of what they as one Godhead have done for us.

Our relationship with the Father is supreme, paramount, and preeminent over all others. He is the God we worship. It is his gospel that saves and exalts. He ordained and established the plan of salvation. He is the one who was once as we are now. The life he lives is eternal life, and if we are to gain this greatest of all the gifts of God, it will be because we become like him.

Our relationship with the Father is one of parent and child. He is the one who gave us our agency. It was his plan that provided for a fall and an atonement. And it is to him that we must be reconciled if we are to gain salvation. He is the one to whom we have direct access by prayer, and if there were some need—which there is not!—to single out one member of the Godhead for a special relationship, the Father, not the Son, would be the one to choose.

Our relationship with the Son is one of brother or sister in the premortal life and one of being led to the Father by him while in this mortal sphere. He is the Lord Jehovah who championed our cause before the foundations of the earth were laid. He is the God of Israel, the promised Messiah, and the Redeemer of the world.

By faith we are adopted into his family and become his children. We take upon ourselves his name, keep his commandments, and rejoice in the cleansing power of his blood. Salvation comes by him. From Creation's dawn, as long as eternity endures, there neither has been nor will be another act of such transcendent power and import as his atoning sacrifice.

We do not have a fraction of the power we need to properly praise his holy name and ascribe unto him the honor and power and might and glory and dominion that is his. He is our Lord, our God, and our King.

Our relationship with the Holy Spirit is quite another thing. This holy personage is a Revelator and a Sanctifier. He bears record of the Father and the Son. He dispenses spiritual gifts to the faithful. Those of us who have

received the gift of the Holy Ghost have the right to his constant companionship.

And again, if it were proper—and I repeat, it is not!—to single out one member of the Godhead for some special attention, we might well conclude that member should be the Holy Ghost. We might well adopt as a slogan: Seek the Spirit. The reason of course is that the sanctifying power of the Spirit would assure us of reconciliation with the Father. And any person who enjoys the constant companionship of the Holy Spirit will be in complete harmony with the divine will in all things.

Heresies among Us

Now, in spite of all these truths, which ought to be obvious to every spiritually enlightened person, heresies rear their ugly heads among us from time to time.

There are those deluded cultists, and others who, unless they repent, are on the road to becoming cultists, who choose to believe we should worship Adam. They have found or should find their way out of the Church.

There are others—in the main they are intellectuals without strong testimonies—who postulate that God does not know all things but is progressing in truth and knowledge and will do so everlastingly. These, unless they repent, will live and die weak in the faith and will fall short of inheriting what might have been theirs in eternity.

There are yet others who have an excessive zeal which causes them to go beyond the mark. Their desire for excellence is inordinate. In an effort to be truer than true they devote themselves to gaining a special, personal relationship with Christ that is both improper and perilous.

I say perilous because this course, particularly in the lives of some who are spiritually immature, is a gospel hobby which creates an unwholesome holier-than-thou attitude. In other instances it leads to despondency

because the seeker after perfection knows he is not living the way he supposes he should.

Another peril is that those so involved often begin to pray directly to Christ because of some special friendship they feel has been developed. In this connection a current and unwise book, which advocates gaining a special relationship with Jesus, contains this sentence:

Because the Savior is our mediator, our prayers go through Christ to the Father, and the Father answers our prayers through his Son.

This is plain sectarian nonsense. Our prayers are addressed to the Father, and to him only. They do not go through Christ, or the Blessed Virgin, or St. Genevieve or along the beads of a rosary. We are entitled to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

And I rather suppose that he who sitteth upon the throne will choose his own ways to answer his children, and that they are numerous. Perfect prayer is addressed to the Father, in the name of the Son; and it is uttered by the power of the Holy Ghost; and it is answered in whatever way seems proper by him whose ear is attuned to the needs of his children.

The Mainstream of the Church

Now I know that some may be offended at the counsel that they should not strive for a special and personal relationship with Christ. It will seem to them as though I am speaking out against mother love, or Americanism, or the little red schoolhouse. But I am not. There is a fine line here over which true worshipers will not step.

It is true that there may, with propriety, be a special relationship with a wife, with children, with friends, with teachers, with the beasts of the field and the fowls of the sky and the lilies of the valley. But the very

moment anyone singles out one member of the Godhead as the almost sole recipient of his devotion, to the exclusion of the others, that is the moment when spiritual instability begins to replace sense and reason.

The proper course for all of us is to stay in the mainstream of the Church. This is the Lord’s Church, and it is led by the spirit of inspiration, and the practice of the Church constitutes the interpretation of the scripture.

And you have never heard one of the First Presidency or the Twelve, who hold the keys of the kingdom, and who are appointed to see that we are not “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14)—you have never heard one of them advocate this excessive zeal that calls for gaining a so-called special and personal relationship with Christ.

You have heard them teach and testify of the ministry and mission of the Lord Jesus, using the most persuasive and powerful language at their command. But never, never at any time have they taught or endorsed the inordinate or intemperate zeal that encourages endless, sometimes day-long prayers, in order to gain a personal relationship with the Savior.

Those who truly love the Lord and who worship the Father in the name of the Son by the power of the Spirit, according to the approved patterns, maintain a reverential barrier between themselves and all the members of the Godhead.

I am well aware that some who have prayed for endless hours feel they have a special and personal relationship with Christ that they never had before. I wonder if this is any or so much different, however, from the feelings of fanatical sectarians who with glassy eyes and fiery tongues assure us they have been saved by grace and are assured of a place with the Lord in a heavenly abode, when in fact they have never even received the fullness of the gospel.

I wonder if it is not part of Lucifer's system to make people feel they are special friends of Jesus when in fact they are not following the normal and usual pattern of worship found in the true Church.

Let me remind you to stay in the course chartered by the Church. It is the Lord's Church, and he will not permit it to be led astray. If we take the counsel that comes from the prophets and seers, we will pursue the course that is pleasing to the Lord.

Would it be amiss if I reminded you that Jesus maintained a reserve between him and his disciples and that he did not allow them the same intimacy with him that they had with each other? This was particularly true after his resurrection.

For instance, when Mary Magdalene, in a great outpouring of love and devotion, sought to embrace the risen Lord, her hands were stayed. "Touch me not," he said. Between her and him, no matter what the degree of their love, there was a line over which she could not pass. And yet, almost immediately thereafter, a whole group of faithful women held that same Lord by the feet, and, we cannot doubt, bathed his wounded feet with their tears.

It is a fine and sacred line, but clearly there is a difference between a personal and intimate relationship with the Lord, which is improper, and one of worshipful adoration, which yet maintains the required reserve between us and him who has bought us with his blood.

Conclusion

Now I sincerely hope that no one will imagine that I have in the slightest degree downgraded the Lord Jesus in the scheme of things. I have not done so. As far as I know there is not a man on earth who thinks more highly of him than I do. It just may be that I have preached more sermons, taught more doctrine, and written more words about the Lord Jesus Christ than any other man now living. I have ten large volumes in print, seven of which deal almost entirely with Christ, and the other three with him and his doctrines.

I do not suppose that what I have here said will be an end to controversy or to the spread of false views and doctrines. The devil is not dead, and he delights in controversy. But you have been warned, and you have heard the true doctrine taught. Those who need to study the matter further would do well to get and study a copy of what I have said when it is published by Brigham Young University.

Let us then end on the note of testimony and of prayer. I bear record of the divine sonship of him whom we have this day spoken. He is or should be our best Friend through whom we can be reconciled to God.

And I pray that the true doctrine of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, who, as the Book of Mormon says, are one God, may be found in the hearts and souls of all of us. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.