



Article of Faith Number 4, by Michael Clane Graves (1982, acrylic on canvas). The first principles of the gospel, here represented geometrically, are faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Brigham Young University.

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FIRST PRINCIPLES OF THE GOSPEL

The first principles and ordinances of the gospel are "first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost" (A of F 4). The resurrected Savior taught that these principles constitute his "gospel": "Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day. Verily, verily, I say unto you, this is my gospel" (3 Ne. 27:20–21; cf. Acts 2:37–38). These four principles prepare one to *enter* the "strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life" (2 Ne. 31:17–18).

First, faith in Jesus Christ often begins with a

desire to believe (Alma 32:26–28), which may be kindled by hearing or reading others' true testimonies of Christ and his atonement. One nourishes faith by patient obedience to God's commandments. Faith then grows through a process that includes REPENTANCE, baptism for REMISSION OF SINS, increased confidence in Christ, and eventually a Christlike nature (Hafen, pp. 141–200).

Repentance involves (1) realization of guilt; (2) godly sorrow and suffering; (3) confession for relief from the hurtful effects of sin; (4) restitution, as far as it is possible; (5) replacement of sin with obedience to God's requirements; and (6) acceptance of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Through the Atonement, if one repents, Christ's mercy satisfies the demands of justice.

Baptism, the third principle and first essential ordinance, is the fruit of repentance and is required of all who would be saved in the KINGDOM OF GOD (John 3:3–5; cf. 2 Ne. 9:23). Baptism has several purposes. It is a symbolic washing and cleansing of sins and is prerequisite to membership in the Church. When followed by the reception of the Holy Ghost, it is the doorway to personal SANCTIFICATION (Moro. 6:1–4). The prescribed method of baptism is by immersion in water by a PRIEST in the AARONIC PRIESTHOOD or by one who holds the MELCHIZEDEK PRIESTHOOD. "The symbolism of the rite is preserved in no other form" (AF, p. 137).

Being "born of the Spirit," or receiving the GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST, entitles one to the continual help, guidance, and comfort of the Holy Ghost. "The special office of the Holy Ghost is to enlighten and ennoble the mind, to purify and sanctify the soul, to incite to good works, and to reveal the things of God" (AF, p. 167). When asked how the Church differed from the other religions of the day, Joseph Smith replied that "we differed in mode of baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost . . . [and] that all other considerations [of differences from other churches] were contained in the gift of the Holy Ghost" (HC 4:42). The gift of the Holy Ghost is conferred by the LAYING-ON OF HANDS by a holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood.

Summarizing the process from faith and repentance to sanctification, the Book of Mormon prophet Mormon stated, "And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins; and the remission of sins bringeth

meekest, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, 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” (Moro. 8:25–26).

These four principles and ordinances of the gospel are “first” because they both initiate and enable the process of development from a spiritual rebirth to a divine nature.

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FIRST VISION

The First Vision of the Prophet Joseph SMITH is the beginning point, the fountainhead, of the RESTORATION of the gospel in this DISPENSATION. This theophany occurred in a grove near Palmyra, New York, in the spring of 1820.

Joseph's narratives record that when he was in his twelfth year he began to sense the need for redemption and investigated several religious groups. A short time after his family moved to Manchester, New York, he witnessed unusual religious excitement in the area, bringing divisions of allegiance in his community and family. As converts began filing off to one faith and another, he observed that their professed good feelings for each other were lost in “a strife of words and a contest about opinions” (JS—H 1:5–8). Confused and concerned, he asked himself, “If any one of them be right which is it? And how shall I know it?” (Backman, pp. 156, 162, 168; Jessee, p. 198).

Searching the scriptures, Joseph was influenced by an admonition to prayer in the epistle of JAMES. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God” (James 1:5). “Never,” he later recalled, “did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine” (JS—H 1:12). He retired to a secluded grove near his father's log-cabin farmhouse and knelt in prayer (Backman, p. 156).

A struggle with a satanic influence followed, but with divine help he survived it. As he continued to call upon God, he records, “I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.” Immediately he was delivered from oppressive darkness (JS—H 1:16). Within the light, he saw two personages “whose brightness and glory defy all description” and who “exactly resembled each other in features and likeness” (JS—H 1:17; WENTWORTH LETTER, Backman, p. 169). One of them spoke his name, pointed to the other, and said, “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” (JS—H 1:17). In what followed, Joseph learned that through Christ, who had taken upon himself the SINS of mankind, he was forgiven of his sins. “Behold I am the Lord of glory. I was crucified for the world that all those who believe on my name may have eternal life” (Backman, p. 157). He was also assured of the reality and imminence of



First Vision, by Gary E. Smith (1979, oil on canvas, 24" × 30"). Unable to determine for himself what church or sect was right, fourteen-year-old Joseph Smith determined to ask God. Following his prayer, he recorded, “I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” (JS—H 1:17). Courtesy Blaine T. Hudson.