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TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST

For Latter-day Saints, the FIRST PRINCIPLE OF THE GOSPEL is FAITH in Jesus Christ. This faith is intertwined with “the testimony of Jesus,” which is received from God, “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). Joseph Smith said, “No man can *know* that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (TPJS, p. 223; 1 Cor. 12:3). The essence of a TESTIMONY is a personal inward assurance of Jesus Christ’s divinity, and it provides the fundamental basis for a Christian life. One becomes a disciple of Christ in the fullest spiritual sense only when a personal testimony of Jesus is received.

To have such a testimony is to be conscious that God has borne witness within one’s soul by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ (D&C 46:13). How is this witness obtained? As Paul wrote, “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The testimony of Jesus Christ comes to those who hear of him. But to hear the GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST preached is not yet to have a testimony of him. Divine confirmation must also be received, usually in answer to sincere prayer. These three elements usually occur in a sequence: hearing, praying, receiving the divine witness by the Spirit. They can also occur simultaneously. Following Peter’s earnest declaration, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus replied, “Blessed art thou . . . for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 16:16–17). Like Peter, PROPHETS and APOSTLES of all ages have testified of Jesus Christ (see John 20:31).

Praying for a testimony of Jesus Christ or for any other truth of the gospel does not assume the presence of the faith being sought. The common phrase, “acting in good faith,” may offer insight here. It suggests a willingness to approach a matter not with suspicion but with trust. The Book of Mormon prophet ALMA₂ asks his listeners to “awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words . . . even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words” (Alma 32:27). To those willing to open their hearts at least this much, a testimony may come,

but hardly to those without a fervent desire to obtain it. Most Latter-day Saints treasure the spiritual experiences that awaken and confirm testimony.

The gaining of a testimony is best viewed not as a single event but as a continuing process. Just as spiritual indolence and disobedience to the commandments of Christ constantly weaken a testimony, so close communion with God and selfless Christian service progressively strengthen it. Because Latter-day Saints view religion as an active as well as a contemplative way of life, they stress the unity of these two ends. Drawing close to God and serving others are aspects of a single purpose, following Christ. Only those who seek to do this may come to truly know him. “For how knoweth a man the master whom he has not served, and who is a stranger unto him, and is far from the thoughts and intents of his heart?” (Mosiah 5:13). But to all who follow him, the testimony of Jesus Christ gives an assurance of his presence, his all-enveloping care, and his love.

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THANKFULNESS

From time immemorial those who believe in God have expressed their thankfulness to him. Giving humble thanks is also among the most basic religious expressions of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as with religious people everywhere. It is also a prescribed element of prayer (D&C 46:32).

In ancient times MOSES offered sacrifices of thanksgiving (Lev. 7:11–13) and King Hezekiah gave “thank offerings” (2 Chr. 29:30–31). Ascribed to David are the Talmud’s One Hundred Daily Benedictions that begin with “Blessed are thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe!” and express gratitude for common as well as exceptional activities, enjoyments, natural phenomena, and encounters with remarkable persons. Upon receiving good news or blessings, the Hebrews uttered appreciation for God’s munificence; when experiencing trials they thanked God because he is just.

Jesus memorably taught the appropriateness of gratitude after he healed ten lepers on his way to Jerusalem. When only one of the ten, a Samaritan,

gave earnest thanks, Christ commented, “Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?” (Luke 17:11–19). Later, Paul emphasized that the righteous should “in every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thes. 5:18).

In the Book of Mormon the prophet ALMA₂ admonished Christ’s followers to acquire his attributes, among them, “asking for whatsoever things ye stand in need, both spiritual and temporal; always returning thanks unto God for whatsoever things ye do receive” (Alma 7:23). Modern scripture promises that “he who receiveth all things with thankfulness shall be made glorious” (D&C 78:19), and that “in nothing doth man offend God, or against none is his wrath kindled, save those who confess not his hand in all things, and obey not his commandments” (D&C 59:21). Thankfulness is to be offered for “all things” received from the Lord whether or not, from limited human understanding, they initially appear to be blessings.

Although thankfulness is most commonly communicated through prayer, a revelation given to Brigham YOUNG counsels, “If thou art merry, praise the Lord with singing, with music, with dancing, and with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving” (D&C 136:28). Additional appropriate means for expressing thanksgiving include singing hymns (the Latter-day Saints Hymnal lists twenty-seven titles under the topic of “gratitude”); participating in regular Church worship services; commemorating such religious holidays as Easter, Christmas, and Thanksgiving; having a devout personal life characterized by a repentant spirit and righteous works; and showing love toward others.

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THEODICY

Theodicy is the attempt to explain God’s goodness and power and reconcile these with the evident evil in the created world. Since most theologians and religious philosophers in the West have assumed both God’s unconditional power and his absolute goodness, the existence and persistence of evil are often held to be inexplicable. In recent centuries the absence of a convincing theodicy and

the frequent theological resort to mystery as an explanation have led many to atheism.

Latter-day Saint scriptural sources have reshaped certain dimensions of the problem and its resolution.

SELF-EXISTENCE AND OMNIPOTENCE. Traditionally, the affirmation of God’s sovereign power is expressed philosophically by the concept of “omnipotence,” which means that God can do absolutely anything at all, or at least anything “logically possible.” This often accompanies the dogma that all that is was created *ex nihilo* (from nothing) by God. The conclusion follows that all forms of evil, even the “demonic dimension,” must be directly or indirectly God-made.

In Latter-day Saint sources, God is not the only self-existent reality. The CREATION ACCOUNTS and other texts teach that God is not a fiat creator but an organizer and life-giver, that the “pure principles of element” can be neither created nor destroyed (D&C 93; *TPJS*, p. 351), and that the undergirdings of eternal law, with certain “bounds and conditions,” are coexistent with him (cf. D&C 88:34–45). “Omnipotence,” then, means God has all the power it is possible to have in a universe—actually a pluriverse—of these givens. He did not create evil.

APPEARANCE AND REALITY. Often omnipotence is taken to mean that God is able to overrule or overcome whatever lesser powers interfere with his sovereign will. This view still leaves God responsible for everything that occurs, just as it occurs. It follows that if God is truly good, then, despite appearances, all that happens must be good, however horrible the “good” may seem for human beings. “Evil” then is held to be privative (an absence), simply in the human mind, or a matter of perspective. The conclusion follows that this is the best of all possible worlds. But the problem then arises all over again, for why does not God exercise his power to remove the pain that arises from mortal misunderstanding?

Latter-day Saint scripture teaches unmistakably that such things as sin and sinfulness, ignorance, deformity, disease, and death are real. As they and their effects continue to increase and prevail, then even from the perspective of God, this is a less than perfect world. Another realm is conceivable where these evils in individual and community life have been overcome.