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The Beautiful Gift of the Sacrament

*Pray that you will be renewed as you partake of
the sacrament and remember the Savior.*

In April 2017, we had the opportunity to help with the open house at the Paris France Temple before it was dedicated on May 21, 2017. Located on the temple grounds is a beautiful *Christus* statue. It is a copy of the 1838 original masterpiece by Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen. This statue provides a focal point in the gardens and declares to all who come our belief in Jesus Christ. The majesty, size, and setting are captivating. Visitors are drawn to this portrayal of the risen Lord and frequently want to stand there to get their pictures taken.

The statue is frequently referred to as *Christus Consolator*. A consolator is one who consoles.¹ To console means to comfort another at a time of grief or disappointment, to give solace, sympathize with, commiserate with, or show compassion for another.² For us, the *Christus* conveys these divine attributes of the Savior.

The original *Christus Consolator* is located in *Vor Frue Kirke*, the Church of Our Lady, in Copenhagen, Denmark. Surrounded by statues of the Twelve Apostles, the *Christus* is in a columned alcove. Above and below the statue are inscriptions of well-known verses from the Bible.



Christus Consolator in the Church of Our Lady, in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Inscribed at the top, in the panel above the two columns, are these words in Danish: “DENNE ER MIN SØN DEN ELSKELIGE HØRER HAM.” In English: “This is my beloved Son: hear him.”

These words were spoken by God, our Heavenly Father, as Jesus was transfigured on a mountain in front of Peter, James, and John. The complete verse says, “And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him” (Mark 9:7).

On the pedestal on which the *Christus Consolator* stands are these words in Danish: “KOMMER TIL MIG.” In English: “Come unto me.” Of all the words the Savior spoke, nothing is more pleading and important for us than “come unto me.”

The complete verse says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

With this original statue of *Christus Consolator*, we have both the Father’s invitation to hear His Only Begotten Son and the Son’s invitation to come unto Him. In perfect unity,

They invite all to hear and to come.

This is our way back to our heavenly home. “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (Articles of Faith 1:3). Each person can come unto Jesus Christ fully only by receiving the restored gospel. We “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.”³

The Doctrine of Christ

This is the unified message of the Father and the Son. They want all Heavenly Father’s children to follow the doctrine of Christ. Now, just so there is no confusion, the phrase “the doctrine of Christ” means the same as the gospel of Christ.

To emphasize the unity of the Father and the Son in Their message regarding the doctrine of Christ, let’s look at this chart.

	2 Nephi 31	3 Nephi 9	3 Nephi 11	3 Nephi 27	Total
Faith	1	2	4	1	8
Repentance	5	4	4	3	16
Baptism	10	0	13	3	26
Holy Ghost	8	2	6	1	17
Endure	3	0	0	3	6
Father	14	5	20	25	64

We know that the chapters noted here (2 Nephi 31; 3 Nephi 9; 3 Nephi 11; and 3 Nephi 27) contain the doctrine of Christ. These chapters frequently mention faith, repentance, baptism, the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end. The number of times each is mentioned is tabulated. As you can see, faith is mentioned 8 times; repentance, 16 times; baptism, 26 times; the Holy Ghost, 17 times; and enduring to the end, 6 times.

What may be surprising, however, is that we also find that the Father is referenced many times in these chapters. In fact, He is specifically mentioned 64 times, more than baptism is mentioned.⁴ From this, we can know that the doctrine of Christ is the doctrine of both the Father and the Son.

Let's take a closer look at a couple of references to the Father:

“And the Father said: Repent ye, repent ye, and be baptized in the name of my Beloved Son.

“And also, the voice of the Son came unto me, saying:

He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do. . . .

“And I [Nephi] heard a voice from the Father, saying: Yea, the words of my Beloved are true and faithful. He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved” (2 Nephi 31:11–12, 15).

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost testify that this is the only way.

Echoing the words from Matthew, the Father and the Son tell us that we should come unto Christ and take His yoke on us because the burdens we bear can be made light and we can find rest. We all carry burdens. We may be burdened with sin, sorrow, addiction, sickness, guilt, or shame. In these difficulties, looking to Christ brings healing and hope and consolation.

The doctrine of Christ—faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost—is not intended to be experienced as a one-time event. Our theology teaches us that we become perfected by repeatedly “relying wholly upon” the doctrine and merits of Christ (2 Nephi 31:19). This means that we repeat the steps in the doctrine of Christ throughout our lives. Each step builds on the preceding step, and the sequence is intended to be experienced over and over again.

As we exercise faith, it grows stronger. As we continually seek to repent, we improve. We can, through our own efforts, progress from having occasional experiences with the Holy Ghost to having Him as a constant companion. In addition, as we go through life, we can learn of Jesus Christ's attributes and develop these same qualities.⁵ As we become more and more like Him, our hearts are changed and we are able to endure to the end (see, for instance, 2 Nephi 31:2–21; 3 Nephi 11:23–31; 27:13–21; Moroni 4:3; 5:2; 6:6; D&C 20:77, 79; 59:8–9).

It is easy to see how all the steps in the doctrine of Christ can be repeated and built on throughout life. But what about baptism? We are, after all, baptized for ourselves just once.



The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

To answer this question, we should consider a theological masterpiece written by Elder James E. Talmage (1862–1933) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles titled *The Articles of Faith*. It was first published in 1899 and has answered questions about the Church and its foundational teachings for subsequent generations who have read and studied it.

In the table of contents, we see that each chapter, aside from the introductory one, is associated with one of the thirteen articles of faith.⁶ Some articles of faith are covered in more than one chapter, but each chapter is associated with one article of faith.

Interestingly, chapter 9, titled “The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper,” appears right after the chapter about the Holy Ghost.⁷ Elder Talmage associates it with article of faith number four.

At the beginning of chapter 9, Elder Talmage wrote, “In the course of our study of the principles and ordinances of the Gospel, as specified in the fourth of the Articles of Faith, the subject of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper very properly claims attention, the observance of this ordinance

being required of all who have become members of the Church of Christ through compliance with the requirements of faith, repentance, and baptism by water and of the Holy Ghost.”⁸

With those words in mind, we can see why Elder Talmage associates the sacrament with the fourth article of faith. The sacrament is the next ordinance everyone needs after being confirmed a member of the Church.

The sacrament is the next ordinance a man needs after receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood.

The sacrament is the next ordinance individuals need after being endowed in the temple.

The sacrament is the next ordinance a couple needs after being sealed.

The sacrament is the next ordinance we need. The sacrament is key to having faith in Jesus Christ, repenting of sin, and feeling the influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives. It is the mechanism by which we renew the covenants and blessings of baptism.

Handbook 2 says, “Church members are commanded to gather together often to partake of the sacrament to remember the Savior always and to renew the covenants

and blessings of baptism.”⁹ You may ask, “What blessings?” Certainly, a continuing endowment of the Holy Spirit is a blessing of baptism. But is the cleansing effect of baptism, one of its most wonderful blessings, also renewed?

Consider this statement by President Dallin H. Oaks, First Counselor in the First Presidency: “We are commanded to repent of our sins and come to the Lord with a broken heart and a contrite spirit and partake of the sacrament. . . . We witness that we are willing to take upon us the name of Jesus Christ and always remember Him and keep His commandments. When we comply with this covenant, the Lord renews the cleansing effect of our baptism. We are made clean and can always have His spirit to be with us.”¹⁰

Let us caution, though, that “the sacrament has not been established as a specific means of securing remission of sins.”¹¹ In other words, you cannot willfully sin Saturday night and expect to be miraculously forgiven by taking a piece of bread and drinking a little water on Sunday. Repentance is a more involved process requiring remorse and forsaking of sin. Preplanned repentance is repugnant to the Savior.

We qualify for the cleansing power of Jesus Christ when we partake of the sacrament worthily.¹² This is the way we keep ourselves “unspotted from the world” (D&C 59:9). The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper rightfully follows baptism in the repeated application of the doctrine of Christ in the progression of Latter-day Saints toward perfection.

We are to follow this path, with the sacrament becoming the successive ordinance to baptism and reception of the Holy Ghost. Preparation for the sacrament requires forethought and attention. You cannot expect the sacrament to be a spiritual experience if you are scurrying about, texting on your phone, or otherwise being distracted.

So come early to church. As the sacrament hymn begins, make sure your thoughts are focused on the Savior, His Atonement, His love, and His compassion. Pray that you will be renewed as you partake of the sacrament and remember Him.

A Lesson from Rwanda

In 1994 a horrific genocide occurred in Rwanda. Between 600,000 and 900,000 people were killed in a matter of 60 to 90 days.

Eventually, the Church established a branch in the capital city of Kigali. The branch was doing well—without full-time missionaries. In 2011 we were serving in the Africa Southeast Area when we learned, sadly, that our registration as a church with the country of Rwanda was invalid, which meant that we were functioning illegally as a church. We also learned that our meetinghouse, a converted two-story home, was not appropriately zoned to hold Church meetings. The Area Presidency, in consultation with our first contact in the Quorum of the Twelve, made the agonizing decision to close the branch. Our members were no longer able to meet for Church meetings.

Lawyers in Kigali, Salt Lake City, and Johannesburg, South Africa, began working fervently to resolve the problems. All the while, the Saints kept asking when they could meet together again. Months went by without resolution or progress.

After about 10 months, we flew to Kigali to visit those Saints and try to buoy up their spirits. Before we did, we asked that the matter be placed on the temple prayer roll of the weekly meeting of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve.

The Tuesday before our scheduled trip from Johannesburg to Kigali, we were notified that, in a surprising move, the government had granted the Church provisional registration in Kigali. Then on Thursday of the same week, the zoning commission granted an exemption from the zoning ordinance. The Kigali Saints could once again meet in our building without violating the law.

This was miraculous! Members were quickly notified that the branch would be meeting on Sunday. We arrived on Friday and invited members to come to church. When Sunday came, all the members—*all* of them—and many of their friends came to church. They arrived early, eager to be together again. As the sacrament was blessed and passed,

we all experienced an extraordinary renewing, refreshing, and cleansing spirit.

We remember, in the meeting, wondering why we did not feel this same spirit every week as we partook of the sacrament. We looked around at the Saints and realized that they had come hungering and thirsting for the sacrament. Their faith, diligence, and patience brought all of us blessings. We pledged that whenever we again partook of the sacrament, we would remember this experience with the Kigali Saints. We committed that we too would hunger for the blessings of partaking of the sacrament.

You will recall that after the Savior instituted the sacrament among the Nephites, He told them that the sacrament was the key to establishing themselves on His rock. He said:

“And I give unto you a commandment that ye shall do these things [partake of the sacrament]. And if ye shall always do these things blessed are ye, for ye are built upon my rock.

“But whoso among you shall do more or less than these are not built upon my rock, but are built upon a sandy foundation; and when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon them, they shall fall” (3 Nephi 18:12–13).

The sacrament is a beautiful gift we receive each Sunday that helps us in our earthly progression. Through the sacrament, we experience an important element of the doctrine of Christ, bringing us closer to our Savior and experiencing His love and forgiveness in our lives. We are grateful for these moments each week, which help us stay focused on the Savior.

“Just for Me”

A friend of ours in South Africa shared how she came to this realization. When Diane was a new convert, she attended a branch outside of Johannesburg. One Sunday, as she sat in the congregation, the layout of the chapel prevented a deacon from seeing her as he passed the

sacrament. Diane was disappointed but said nothing. Another member noted the omission and mentioned it to the branch president after the meeting. As Sunday School began, Diane was invited to an empty classroom.

A priesthood holder came in. He knelt, blessed some bread, and handed her a piece. She ate it. He knelt again, blessed some water, and handed her a small cup. She drank it. Diane had two thoughts in rapid succession: “Oh, he [the priesthood holder] did this just for me,” and then, “Oh, He [the Savior] did this just for me.” Through the sacrament, Diane felt Heavenly Father’s love just for her.

Her realization that the Savior’s sacrifice was just for her helped her feel close to Him and fueled an overwhelming desire to keep that feeling in her heart—not just Sunday but every day. She realized that although she sat in a congregation to partake of the sacrament, the covenants she made anew each Sunday were individually hers. The sacrament helped—and continues to help—Diane feel the power of godly love, recognize the Lord’s hand in her life, and draw closer to the Savior.¹³

Our invitation is the same as Moroni’s:

“Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

“And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:32–33).

This happens as we apply the doctrine of Christ, viewing the sacrament as the successive ordinance to baptism and reception of the Holy Ghost. In this way,



we can rely “wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Nephi 31:19). We are so grateful for the sacrament—how it teaches and reminds us each week of what our Savior did for us. We are so grateful to Him because we know He atoned just for each one of us.

When the Savior spoke to the Nephites, He said *when* rain, wind, and floods come. He didn’t say *if*. In fact, rain, winds, and floods come to everyone. But He told us that the way we are established on His rock is to look to Him as we partake of the sacrament (see 3 Nephi 15:9; 18:1).

The time will come in each of your lives when there will be a hesitation to go to church and partake of the sacrament. If it hasn’t happened yet, it will. But know this: if you follow the Savior’s direction and partake of the sacrament with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, blessings will pour upon you that will keep you firm, solid, and established on the firm foundation that is Jesus Christ. Your decision to do so will affect eternity. You will establish yourself upon Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith. ■

From a devotional address, “Come unto Christ,” delivered at Brigham Young University–Idaho on September 26, 2017. For the full address, go to web.byui.edu/devotionalsandspeeches.

NOTES

1. See *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (2003), “consolator.”
2. See *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, “console.”
3. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 1.
4. Includes unambiguous Him/He/His.
5. See *Preach My Gospel*, chapter 6, 115–26.
6. See James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 12th ed. (1924), v–ix.
7. See James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, vi.
8. James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 171.
9. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church* (2010), 2.1.2.
10. Dallin H. Oaks, “Special Witnesses of Christ,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2001, 13.
11. James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 175.
12. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Sacrament Meeting and the Sacrament,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2008, 17–20.
13. See Dale G. Renlund, “That I Might Draw All Men unto Me,” *Ensign*, May 2016, 41.