



President Joseph Fielding Smith shared his reason for calling Latter-day Saints to repentance: "I love the members of the Church."



Faith and Repentance

“What we need in the Church, as well as out of it, is repentance. We need more faith and more determination to serve the Lord.”

From the Life of Joseph Fielding Smith

President Joseph Fielding Smith taught, “The forgiveness of sins comes through faith and sincere repentance.”¹ He said that “it is necessary, not merely that we believe, but that we repent,” and he also taught that when we perform good works in faith until the end, we will “receive the reward of the faithful and a place in the Celestial kingdom of God.”² With a desire for all people to receive this reward, he testified of Jesus Christ and preached repentance throughout his ministry.

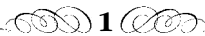
Early in his service as an Apostle, he said: “I have considered that it has been my mission, having been so impressed, I think, by the Spirit of the Lord in my travels in the stakes of Zion, to say unto the people that *now* is the day of repentance and to call upon the Latter-day Saints to remember their covenants, the promises they have made with the Lord, to keep his commandments, and follow the teachings and the instructions of the elders of Israel—the prophets of God—as they have been recorded in these holy scriptures. In all things we should walk humbly and circumspectly before the Lord that we might be blessed and guided by his Holy Spirit. I think this is the day of warning. It has been a time of warning from the day when the prophet first received the manifestation from the heavens that the gospel was to be restored.”³

In a sacrament meeting one Sunday, President Smith told the congregation why he spoke with a warning voice. His son Joseph, who attended the meeting, later wrote: “I remember vividly some of the remarks [my father] made on that occasion. ‘Who is your

friend, or who loves you the most?’ he asked the congregation. ‘The person who tells you all is well in Zion, that prosperity is around the corner or the person who warns you of the calamities and difficulties that are promised unless the principles of the gospel are lived? I want you to know that I love the members of the Church, and I do not want one of them to point an accusing finger at me when we pass beyond the veil of mortal existence and say, “If you had only warned me I would not be in this predicament.” And so I raise the warning voice in hopes that my brothers and sisters may be prepared for a kingdom of glory.’⁴

Those who worked closely with President Smith saw that behind his stern warnings was a man with tender concern for people who struggled in sin. Elder Francis M. Gibbons, who served as a secretary to the First Presidency, was often present when President Smith considered matters of Church discipline. Elder Gibbons recalled: “His decisions were always made in kindness and love and with the widest latitude of mercy that the circumstances could justify. It was not uncommon for him to say on learning the circumstances of an aggravated case, ‘Why don’t people behave themselves?’ This was not said accusingly or by way of condemnation but with sadness and regret.”⁵ President Spencer W. Kimball, who served with President Smith as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said, “Many times we have said that since the Twelve will be judges of Israel, any of us would be happy to fall into his hands, for his judgment would be kind, merciful, just, and holy.”⁶ When President Smith ordained bishops, he often counseled: “Remember, everyone has weaknesses, and there are at least two sides to every story. If you err in judgment, be sure you err on the side of love and mercy.”⁷

Teachings of Joseph Fielding Smith



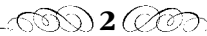
The first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our faith is centered in the Lord Jesus Christ, and through him in the Father. We believe in Christ, accept him as the Son of God, and have taken his name upon us in the waters of baptism.⁸

Let it be uppermost in your minds, now and at all times, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, who came into the world to lay down his life that we might live. That is the truth, and is fundamental. Upon that our faith is built. It can not be destroyed. We must adhere to this teaching in spite of the teachings of the world, and the notions of men; for this is paramount, this is essential to our salvation. The Lord redeemed us with his blood, he gave us salvation, provided—and there is this condition which we must not forget—that we will keep his commandments, and always remember him. If we will do that then we shall be saved, while the ideas and the foolishness of men, shall perish from the earth.⁹

By faith we come to God. If we did not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, if we had no faith in Him or in His atonement, we would not be inclined to pay any heed to His commandments. It is because we have that faith that we are brought into harmony with His truth and have a desire in our hearts to serve Him. . . .

. . . The first principle of the gospel is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and of course we are not going to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ without having faith in His Father. Then if we have faith in God the Father and the Son and are guided, as we ought to be, by the Holy Ghost, we will have faith in the servants of the Lord through whom He has spoken.¹⁰



Faith means action.

“Faith is the moving cause of all action.” [Lectures on Faith, lecture 1.] If you stop to consider that for a moment, I think you will agree that it is absolutely true in temporal things as well as in spiritual things. It is true with us in our own acts, as well as with the acts of God. . . .

“Faith without works is dead” [James 2:26]—in other words, it does not exist. I think James’ meaning clearly is, “You show me your faith without your works, and nothing will result; but I will show you my faith with my works, and something will be accomplished.” [See James 2:18.] Faith means action. . . . Faith, therefore, is stronger than belief. . . .

Faith is a gift of God. Every good thing is a gift of God. That is a teaching of the scriptures as found in the 11th chapter of Hebrews—which chapter is a very fine dissertation on faith—[and] in the revelations the Lord has given us in the Doctrine and Covenants, and in other scriptures. Faith cannot be obtained by inaction or through indifference or passive belief. The mere desire to obtain faith will not bring faith any more than the desire to be skilled in music or painting will bring proficiency in these things without intelligent action. There is where our trouble comes. We get a testimony of the Gospel, we believe in Joseph Smith, we believe in Jesus Christ, we believe in the principles of the Gospel, but how hard are we working at them?

. . . If we want to have a living, abiding faith, we must be active in the performance of every duty as members of this Church. . . .

Oh, if we had the faith manifested by Nephi! Read in the 17th chapter of 1 Nephi where his brothers were opposing him and making fun of him because he was going to build a ship, saying:

“Our brother is a fool, for he thinketh that he can build a ship; yea, and he also thinketh that he can cross these great waters.” [1 Nephi 17:17.]

Nephi answered them:

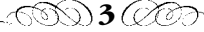

“If God had commanded me to do all things I could do them. If he should command me that I should say unto this water, be thou earth, it should be earth; and if I should say it, it would be done.” [1 Nephi 17:50.]

That was his faith.¹¹

We are not walking now by sight, as we did before we came into this world, but the Lord expects that we shall walk by faith [see 2 Corinthians 5:7]; and walking by faith we shall receive the reward of the righteous, if we adhere unto those commandments which are given for our salvation.¹²

Unless a man will adhere to the doctrine and walk in faith, accepting the truth and observing the commandments as they have been given, it will be impossible for him to receive eternal life, no matter how much he may confess with his lips that Jesus is the

Christ, or believe that his Father sent him into the world for the redemption of man. So James is right when he says that the devils “believe and tremble,” but they do not repent [see James 2:19].¹³

 3 

**Repentance is the second principle of the gospel
and is essential to our salvation and exaltation.**

Repentance is the second fundamental principle of the gospel and the outgrowth of faith.¹⁴

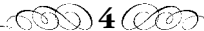

What we need in the Church, as well as out of it, is repentance. We need more faith and more determination to serve the Lord.¹⁵

Is it true that some among us have an idea that it matters not that we sin so long as it is not a grievous sin, a deadly sin, that we will yet be saved in the kingdom of God? Nephi saw our day. He said that people would be saying that [see 2 Nephi 28:7–9]. But I say unto you, we cannot turn away from the path of truth and righteousness and retain the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord.¹⁶

There is no place in Zion for the wilful sinner. There is a place for the repentant sinner, for the man who turns away from iniquity and seeks for life eternal and the light of the Gospel. We should not look upon sin with the least degree of allowance, any more than the Lord can do so, but walk uprightly and perfectly before the Lord.¹⁷

Men can only be saved and exalted in the kingdom of God in righteousness; therefore, we must repent of our sins and walk in the light as Christ is in the light [see 1 John 1:7], that his blood may cleanse us from all sins and that we may have fellowship with the Lord and receive of his glory and exaltation.¹⁸

We need repentance, and we need to be told to repent.¹⁹

 4 

**In the principle of repentance, the mercy of Heavenly
Father and Jesus Christ is made manifest.**

Repentance is one of the most comforting and glorious principles taught in the gospel. In this principle the mercy of our Heavenly Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, is made manifest perhaps more strongly than in any other principle. What a dreadful thing it would be if there were no forgiveness of sin and no



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means for the remission of sin for those who are humbly repentant! We can only imagine in part the horror that would overtake us, if we had to endure the punishment of our transgressions forever and ever without the hope of any relief. How is that relief obtained? By whom may it be obtained?

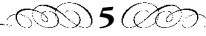
Our Lord has said:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

“For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” [John 3:16–17; see also verses 18–21.]

If the Father had not sent Jesus Christ into the world, then there could have been no remission of sins and there could have been no relief from sin through repentance.²⁰

If we really understood and could feel even to a small degree, the love and gracious willingness on the part of Jesus Christ to suffer for our sins we would be willing to repent of all our transgressions and serve him.²¹



**Repentance includes sincere sorrow for
sin and complete turning from sin.**

The scriptures say:

“Thou shalt offer a sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in righteousness, even that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit.” [D&C 59:8.]

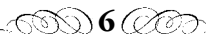
That means repentance.

. . . Repentance, according to the definition given in the dictionary, is sincere sorrow for sin with self-condemnation, and complete turning from the sin. . . . There can be no true repentance without sorrow and the desire to be freed from sin.

Contrition is manifestation of a broken, or humbled, spirit because of sin and a sincere sense of the baseness of sin and realization of the mercy and grace of God granted to the repentant sinner. . . . For that reason the Lord says, as I have already quoted, we are to offer a sacrifice “in righteousness, even that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit.” . . .

Repentance is a gift of God. . . . It is not so easy for some people to repent, but the gift of repentance and faith will be given to every man who will seek for it.²²

I’ve learned from my own experience that when you want to change, really want to change, you can do it. Our conscience and the scriptures tell us what to live by—and they tell us what habits we should change for our eternal welfare and progress.²³



The time to repent is now.

God is not going to save every man and woman in the celestial kingdom. If you want to get there, and you have failings, if you are committing sins, if you are breaking the commandments of the Lord and you know it, it is a good time right now to repent and reform,

and not get the idea that it is such a little thing that the Lord will forgive you, just a few stripes, just a little punishment and we will be forgiven; for you may find yourselves cast out, if you insist and persist in such a course.²⁴

Procrastination, as it may be applied to gospel principles, is the thief of eternal life, which is life in the presence of the Father and the Son. There are many among us, even members of the Church, who feel that there is no need for haste in the observance of gospel principles and the keeping of the commandments. . . .

Do not let us forget the words of [Amulek]: “For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God; yea, behold the day of this life is the day for men to perform their labors.

“And now, as I said unto you before, as ye have had so many witnesses, therefore, I beseech of you that ye do not procrastinate the day of your repentance until the end; for after this day of life, which is given us to prepare for eternity, behold, if we do not improve our time while in this life, then cometh the night of darkness wherein there can be no labor performed.

“Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in the eternal world.” [Alma 34:32–34.]²⁵



We owe it to the world to raise a voice of warning.

The Lord intends that men shall be happy—that is his purpose—but men refuse to be happy and make themselves miserable, because they think their ways are better than God’s ways, and because of selfishness, greed, and the wickedness that is in their hearts; and that is the trouble with us today.²⁶

From the observation that we make as we travel from one place to another and from what we read in the public press, we are of necessity forced to the conclusion that repentance from sin is extremely essential throughout the world today.²⁷

Do not think that we have reached a condition where things could not be worse. Unless there is repentance they will be worse. And so I cry repentance to this people, to the Latter-day Saints, . . . and to the nations of the earth everywhere.²⁸

We owe it to the world, to raise a voice of warning, and especially to the members of the Church [see D&C 88:81].²⁹

It is our duty to look after each other, to protect each other, to warn each other of dangers, to teach each other the principles of the Gospel of the kingdom, and to stand together with a united front against the sins of the world.³⁰

I know of nothing that is more important or necessary at this time than to cry repentance, even among the Latter-day Saints, and I call upon them as well as upon those who are not members of the Church, to heed these words of our Redeemer. Now he has stated definitely that no unclean thing can enter his presence. Only those who prove themselves faithful and have washed their garments in his blood through their faith and their repentance—none others shall find the kingdom of God.³¹

“Behold, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people shall dwell safely in the Holy One of Israel, if it so be that they will repent.” [1 Nephi 22:28.] And I pray that they will repent. I want them to dwell safely. I want them to believe in the Holy One of Israel, who came into the world and atoned for our sins, for the sins of all mankind, who gave unto us redemption from death, who has promised unto us salvation and the remission of our sins on the condition of our repentance.

O, I wish all mankind would believe in him, would worship him and his Father, and would serve the Lord our God in the name of the Son, and then peace would come, then righteousness would prevail, then the Lord could establish his kingdom upon the earth.³²

I plead with the world to repent and believe the truth, to let the light of Christ shine in their lives, to keep every good and true principle they have, and to add to these the further light and knowledge that has come by revelation in this day. I plead with them to join The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and reap the blessings of the gospel.

I plead with the members of the Church to do the works of righteousness, to keep the commandments, to seek the Spirit, to love the Lord, to put first in their lives the things of God's kingdom, and thereby work out their salvation with fear and trembling before the Lord [see Philippians 2:12].³³

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Questions

- In “From the Life of Joseph Fielding Smith,” review President Smith’s comments about why he wanted to “raise the warning voice.” How is the call to repent an expression of love?
- What does it mean to you to center your faith in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ? (See section 1.)
- Why does true faith always lead to action? (For some examples, see section 2.) What are some ways we can show our faith by our actions?
- How is repentance an “outgrowth of faith”? (See section 3.)
- Silently reflect on a time when you repented and felt the mercy and love of Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ (see section 4). What can you share about your gratitude for the Savior’s Atonement?
- Why is repentance impossible “without sorrow and the desire to be freed from sin”? (See section 5.) How might the last two paragraphs in section 5 provide hope for someone who feels sorrow because of sin?
- In what ways is procrastination “the thief of eternal life”? (See section 6.) What are the dangers of procrastinating our repentance?
- As you review section 7, consider what it means to “raise a voice of warning.” How can we be kind and loving in our efforts to warn others?

Related Scriptures

Hebrews 11:1–6; Mosiah 4:1–3; Alma 34:17; Ether 12:4; Moroni 7:33–34; D&C 18:10–16; Articles of Faith 1:4

Teaching Help

“It is the pupil who has to be put into action. When a teacher takes the spotlight, becomes the star of the show, does all the talking, and otherwise takes over all of the activity, it is almost certain that he is interfering with the learning of the class members” (Asahel D. Woodruff, *Teaching the Gospel* [1962], 37; in Virginia H. Pearce, “The Ordinary Classroom—A Powerful Place for Steady and Continued Growth,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 12).

Notes

1. *Answers to Gospel Questions*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., 5 vols. (1957–66), 1:84.
2. “Faith and Works: The Clearing of a Seeming Conflict,” *Improvement Era*, Oct. 1924, 1151; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (1954–56), 2:311.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 1919, 88; italics in original.
4. Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., in *Take Heed to Yourselves!* (1966), v–vi.
5. Francis M. Gibbons, *Joseph Fielding Smith: Gospel Scholar, Prophet of God* (1992), viii.
6. Spencer W. Kimball, quoted by Bruce R. McConkie in “Joseph Fielding Smith: Apostle, Prophet, Father in Israel,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1972, 28.
7. In Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. and John J. Stewart, *The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith* (1972), 10.
8. In Conference Report, Apr. 1970, 113.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 1921, 186; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:302.
10. “Redemption of Little Children,” *Deseret News*, Apr. 29, 1939, Church section, 3; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:302–3.
11. “Faith,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 16, 1935, Church section, 3, 7.
12. In Conference Report, Apr. 1923, 139.
13. “Faith and Works: The Clearing of a Seeming Conflict,” 1151; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:311.
14. *The Restoration of All Things* (1945), 196.
15. “The Pearl of Great Price,” *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, July 1930, 104; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:48.
16. In Conference Report, Oct. 1950, 13.
17. In Conference Report, Apr. 1915, 120.
18. In Conference Report, Oct. 1969, 109.
19. “A Warning Cry for Repentance,” *Deseret News*, May 4, 1935, Church section, 6; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:44.
20. *The Restoration of All Things*, 196–97.
21. *The Restoration of All Things*, 199.
22. “Repentance and Baptism,” *Deseret News*, Mar. 30, 1935, Church section, 6.
23. “My Dear Young Fellow Workers,” *New Era*, Jan. 1971, 5.
24. “Relief Society Conference Minutes,” *Relief Society Magazine*, Aug. 1919, 473, see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:17.
25. In Conference Report, Apr. 1969, 121, 123.
26. “A Warning Cry for Repentance,” 6; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:35.
27. In Conference Report, Oct. 1966, 58.
28. In Conference Report, Oct. 1932, 91–92; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:31–32.
29. In Conference Report, Apr. 1937, 59; see also *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3:49.
30. In Conference Report, Apr. 1915, 120.
31. In Conference Report, Oct. 1960, 51.
32. In Conference Report, Oct. 1919, 92.
33. In Conference Report, Oct. 1970, 7–8.