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God the Eternal Father

“The purposes of our God are great, His love unfathomable, His wisdom infinite, and His power unlimited; therefore, the Saints have cause to rejoice and be glad.”

From the Life of Joseph Smith

Among Joseph Smith’s progenitors were many who sought to know the true God in their day. Joseph’s own parents were deeply spiritual, and although they did not find the full truth about God in the churches around them, they honored the Bible as God’s word and made prayer a part of daily life. The Prophet’s brother William recalled: “My father’s religious habits were strictly pious and moral. . . . I was called upon to listen to prayers both night and morning. . . . My parents, father and mother, poured out their souls to God, the donor of all blessings, to keep and guard their children and keep them from sin and from all evil works. Such was the strict piety of my parents.”¹ William also said: “We always had family prayers since I can remember. I well remember father used to carry his spectacles in his vest pocket, . . . and when us boys saw him feel for his specs, we knew that was a signal to get ready for prayer, and if we did not notice it mother would say, ‘William,’ or whoever was the negligent one, ‘get ready for prayer.’ After the prayer we had a song we would sing; I remember part of it yet: ‘Another day has passed and gone, We lay our garments by.’ ”²

This early spiritual training sank deep into young Joseph Smith’s soul. When he became concerned about his eternal welfare and sought to know which church to join, he knew he could turn to God for answers:

“I learned in the scriptures that God was the same yesterday, today, and forever, that he was no respecter to persons, for he

was God. For I looked upon the sun, the glorious luminary of the earth, and also the moon rolling in [its] majesty through the heavens and also the stars shining in their courses; and the earth also upon which I stood, and the beast of the field and the fowls of heaven and the fish of the waters; and also man walking forth upon the face of the earth in majesty and in the strength of beauty, [with] power and intelligence in governing the things which are so exceedingly great and marvelous, even in the likeness of him who created them.

“And when I considered upon these things my heart exclaimed, Well hath the wise man said it is a fool that saith in his heart there is no God [see Psalm 53:1]. My heart exclaimed, All these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotent and omnipresent power, a Being who maketh laws and decreeth and bindeth all things in their bounds, who filleth eternity, who was and is and will be from all eternity to eternity. And when I considered all these things and that that Being seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth [see John 4:23], therefore I cried unto the Lord for mercy, for there was none else to whom I could go and obtain mercy.”³

Joseph’s faithful prayer for mercy and wisdom was answered with the First Vision. That vision gave the young Prophet far greater knowledge about God than any of the churches of his day possessed, knowledge that had been lost to the world for centuries. In the First Vision, Joseph learned for himself that the Father and the Son are individual beings, that Their power is greater than the power of evil, and that man is indeed fashioned in God’s image—truths that are essential in understanding our actual relationship to our Father in Heaven.

Other revelations about the nature of God followed, including many that are now in our latter-day scriptures. As God’s chosen instrument in restoring gospel truth to the world, the Prophet testified of God throughout his ministry. “I am going to inquire after God,” he declared, “for I want you all to know Him, and to be familiar with Him. . . . You will then know that I am His servant; for I speak as one having authority.”⁴

Teachings of Joseph Smith

God is the loving Father of all mankind and the source of all that is good.

“While one portion of the human race is judging and condemning the other without mercy, the Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard; He views them as His offspring, and without any of those contracted feelings that influence the children of men, causes ‘His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.’ [Matthew 5:45.]”⁵

“We admit that God is the great source and fountain from whence proceeds all good; that He is perfect intelligence, and that His wisdom is alone sufficient to govern and regulate the mighty creations and worlds which shine and blaze with such magnificence and splendor over our heads, as though touched with His finger and moved by His Almighty word. . . . The heavens declare the glory of a God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork [see Psalm 19:1]; and a moment’s reflection is sufficient to teach every man of common intelligence, that all these are not the mere productions of *chance*, nor could they be supported by any power less than an Almighty hand.”⁶

“God sees the secret springs of human action, and knows the hearts of all living.”⁷

“The purposes of our God are great, His love unfathomable, His wisdom infinite, and His power unlimited; therefore, the Saints have cause to rejoice and be glad, knowing that ‘this God is our God forever and ever, and He will be our Guide until death.’ [Psalm 48:14.]”⁸

When we comprehend the character of God, we comprehend ourselves and know how to approach Him.

“There are but a very few beings in the world who understand rightly the character of God. The great majority of mankind do not comprehend anything, either that which is past, or that which is to come, as it respects their relationship to God. They

do not know, neither do they understand the nature of that relationship; and consequently they know but little above the brute beast, or more than to eat, drink and sleep. This is all man knows about God or His existence, unless it is given by the inspiration of the Almighty.

“If a man learns nothing more than to eat, drink and sleep, and does not comprehend any of the designs of God, the beast comprehends the same things. It eats, drinks, sleeps, and knows nothing more about God; yet it knows as much as we, unless we are able to comprehend by the inspiration of Almighty God. If men do not comprehend the character of God, they do not comprehend themselves. I want to go back to the beginning, and so lift your minds into more lofty spheres and a more exalted understanding than what the human mind generally aspires to.

“. . . The scriptures inform us that ‘This is life eternal that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.’ [John 17:3.]

“If any man does not know God, and inquires what kind of a being He is,—if he will search diligently his own heart—if the declaration of Jesus and the apostles be true, he will realize that he has not eternal life; for there can be eternal life on no other principle.

“My first object is to find out the character of the only wise and true God, and what kind of a being He is. . . .

“God Himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by His power, was to make Himself visible,—I say, if you were to see Him today, you would see Him like a man in form—like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form as a man; for Adam was created in the very fashion, image and likeness of God, and received instruction from, and walked, talked and conversed with Him, as one man talks and communes with another. . . .

“. . . Having a knowledge of God, we begin to know how to approach Him, and how to ask so as to receive an answer. When we understand the character of God, and know how to come to



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Him, He begins to unfold the heavens to us, and to tell us all about it. When we are ready to come to Him, He is ready to come to us.”⁹

In the Godhead there are three separate and distinct personages.

Articles of Faith 1:1: “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.”¹⁰

Joseph Smith taught the following in April 1843, later recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 130:22: “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us.”¹¹

“I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father,

and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods.”¹²

“That which is without body or parts is nothing. There is no other God in heaven but that God who has flesh and bones.”¹³

**The Godhead is in perfect unity,
and God the Father presides.**

“There is much said about God and the Godhead. . . . The teachers of the day say that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and they are all in one body and one God. Jesus prayed that those that the Father had given him out of the world might be made one in them, as they were one [see John 17:11–23]. . . .

“Peter and Stephen testify that they saw the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God. Any person that had seen the heavens opened knows that there are three personages in the heavens who hold the keys of power, and one presides over all.”¹⁴

“Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organization of this earth and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth. These personages . . . are called God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer; and God the third, the Witness or Testator.”¹⁵

“[It is] the province of the Father to preside as the Chief or President, Jesus as the Mediator, and the Holy Ghost as the Testator or Witness. The Son [has] a tabernacle and so [does] the Father, but the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit without tabernacle.”¹⁶

“The scripture says, ‘I and my Father are one’ [John 10:30], and again that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are one, and these three agree in the same thing [see 1 John 5:7–8]. So did the Savior pray to the Father, ‘I pray not for the world, but for those whom ye gave me out of the world, that we might be one,’ or to say, be of one mind in the unity of the faith [see John 17:9, 11]. But everyone being a different or separate person, so are God and Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost separate persons, but they all agree in one or the selfsame thing.”¹⁷

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Review pages 37–38, noting how young Joseph Smith saw evidence of an “omnipotent and omnipresent power” in the world around him. As you have observed the world around you, what have you seen that bears testimony of God?
- Review the first section of the chapter (page 39), looking for teachings that reveal the character of God. How can these teachings help us “rejoice and be glad”?
- Joseph Smith taught, “The Great Parent of the universe looks upon the whole of the human family with a fatherly care and paternal regard” (page 39). What are your thoughts and feelings as you ponder this statement?
- Read the paragraph that begins at the bottom of page 39 and also the next paragraph. Why is it impossible to comprehend ourselves if we do not comprehend the character of God?
- The Prophet Joseph Smith testified that God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are “three distinct personages.” He also taught that They are one (page 42). In what ways are the members of the Godhead one? (For some examples, see page 42.)
- In what ways can parents nurture children’s love for their Heavenly Father? (For some examples, see page 37.)

Related Scriptures: John 8:17–19; Hebrews 1:1–3; 12:9; Moses 1:3–6, 39

Notes

1. William Smith, Notes on Chambers’ life of Joseph Smith, ca. 1875, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. William Smith, interview by E. C. Briggs and J. W. Peterson, Oct. or Nov. 1893, originally published in *Zion’s Ensign* (periodical published by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, now called Community of Christ); reprinted in *Deseret Evening News*, Jan. 20, 1894, p. 2; punctuation modernized.
3. Joseph Smith, History 1832, pp. 2–3; Letter Book 1, 1829–35, Joseph Smith, Collection, Church Archives.

4. *History of the Church*, 6:305; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton.
5. *History of the Church*, 4:595; from “Baptism for the Dead,” an editorial published in *Times and Seasons*, Apr. 15, 1842, p. 759; Joseph Smith was the editor of the periodical.
6. *History of the Church*, 2:12, 14; paragraph divisions altered; from “The Elders of the Church in Kirtland, to Their Brethren Abroad,” Jan. 22, 1834, published in *Evening and Morning Star*, Feb. 1834, p. 136; Mar. 1834, p. 142.
7. *History of the Church*, 1:317; from a letter from Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, Jan. 11, 1833, Kirtland, Ohio; this letter is incorrectly dated Jan. 14, 1833, in *History of the Church*.
8. *History of the Church*, 4:185; from a letter from Joseph Smith and his counselors in the First Presidency to the Saints, Sept. 1840, Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 1840, p. 178.
9. *History of the Church*, 6:303–5, 308; capitalization modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton; see also the appendix in this book, page 562, item 3.
10. Articles of Faith 1:1.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 130:22; instructions given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 2, 1843, in Ramus, Illinois.
12. *History of the Church*, 6:474; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 16, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock.
13. Quoted by William Clayton, reporting an undated discourse given by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois; in L. John Nuttall, “Extracts from William Clayton’s Private Book,” p. 7, Journals of L. John Nuttall, 1857–1904, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; copy in Church Archives.
14. *History of the Church*, 5:426; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 11, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff and Willard Richards.
15. Quoted by William Clayton, reporting an undated discourse given by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, Illinois; in L. John Nuttall, “Extracts from William Clayton’s Private Book,” pp. 10–11, Journals of L. John Nuttall, 1857–1904, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; copy in Church Archives.
16. Quoted by William P. McIntire, reporting a discourse given by Joseph Smith in early 1841 in Nauvoo, Illinois; William Patterson McIntire, Notebook 1840–45, Church Archives. William McIntire made brief reports of several discourses given by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo in early 1841. This book quotes from four of these reports, none of which is dated.
17. Quoted by George Laub, in compilation of excerpts from Joseph Smith’s discourses, ca. 1845; George Laub, *Reminiscences and Journal* Jan. 1845–Apr. 1857, pp. 29–30, Church Archives.