

Re-evaluating our lives and recommitting to following Christ by living the standards in the For the Strength of YOUTH

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Good afternoon, Brothers and Sisters. The subject I have been called upon to address is: “re-evaluating our lives and recommitting to following Jesus Christ by living the standards in the For the Strength of Youth (FSOY).”

Straightaway I have a comment to make about how **WE MUST NOT** use the FSOY manual in our teaching and in our lives. We must not elevate it to doctrine or to scripture.

On the subject of what is doctrine, The Lord Jesus Christ spoke forcefully to the Nephites (in 3 Nephi 11:32-40)

32. And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me.

33. And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.

34. And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned.

35. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also, and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost.

After repeating this same statement several times for emphasis, the Lord closes with this **STRICT** warning:

40. And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them.

NB: Incidentally, the word baptize or its derivative is used 13 times in this chapter!

The meaning of these verses is clear: the only thing that we can properly call doctrine is the ***Doctrine of Jesus Christ: His atonement, faith in Him, repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins.***

We have other official teachings and principles, no doubt, but the emphasis of these verses makes it crystal clear how they should be treated.

The Prophet Joseph Smith stated it in these words:

“The fundamental principles of our religion are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.”

So the teachings, principles, and moral standards outlined in the FSOY are not themselves doctrine, but only appendages to our only true doctrine.

It is not enough to say that our standards make us a “peculiar people.” The same could also be said of the Pharisees, about whom the Bible Dictionary writes:

“They prided themselves on their strict observance of the law and on the care with which they avoided contact with things gentile...

The tendency of their teaching was to reduce religion to the observance of a multiplicity of ceremonial rules and to encourage self-sufficiency and spiritual pride.”

If used and taught in this way the standards in the FSOY become not a helpful guide, but rather - what the scriptures refer to as - a **STUMBLING BLOCK** to those who would come unto Christ and receive Him and prepare for His everlasting blessings!

For example, when Elizabeth Smart, who was kidnapped and sexually abused, says she felt worthless and nearly gave up all hope because she had been taught in a lesson on chastity that we are like pieces of gum, and who would want a “chewed piece of gum?!” Or the gay young man that I read about who became suicidal after reading the FSOY and what it said about homosexuality. These are examples of our standards being taught and understood far far outside of our true doctrine!

When we disproportionately emphasize moral standards (that is above and divorced from the doctrine of Christ) we may have a form of godliness, but we deny the power thereof!

The great Christian writer C.S. Lewis stated in his characteristically eloquent way this idea in his essay titled “Man or Rabbit?”:

*“The idea of reaching ‘a good life’ without Christ is based on a double error. Firstly, we cannot do it, and secondly, in setting up ‘a good life’ as our final goal, we have missed the very point of our existence. Morality is a mountain which we cannot climb by our own efforts; and if we could we should only perish in the ice and unbreathable air of the summit, lacking those wings with which the rest of the journey has to be accomplished. For it is **from** there that the real ascent begins. The ropes and axes are ‘done away’ and the rest is a matter of flying.”*

Morality is indispensable, of course, **BUT** we must understand that our own moral efforts are but a drop in the Fountain of Living Waters that the Savior says will flow unto us forever and ever because of His mercy and love.

It is something to be swallowed up in the purpose for which we were made, which in the words of the Creator Himself are thus declared: *immortality and eternal life*. (see Moses 1:39).

With this important warning properly understood, we can now evaluate this helpful resource.

One of my favorite verses of scripture was an addition made by Joseph Smith as he was translating the New Testament. It is tucked away in a footnote (JST Luke 14:28). In this verse Jesus says to His disciples:

“Wherefore, settle this in your hearts, that ye will do the things which I shall teach, and command you.”

I believe this is how we must properly view the standards outlined in the FSOY: as the daily practice of committed disciples of Jesus Christ, whose call to us is this:

“If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (see John 14:15)

The process of becoming thus settled in our hearts will take us a lifetime - and longer - and will require constant recommitment. We will stumble in our daily walk, and in our stumbling we must recall the doctrine of Jesus Christ: *“whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, shall be saved.”*

And as it says in the New Testament: *“When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.”* (see 1 Cor. 13:10)

In one of the most beautiful chapters in the Book of Mormon (Alma 32), Alma sums this all up for us by reminding us of the analogy of the mustard seed - which we must choose to plant in our hearts in faith - that will grow into something marvelous. In verse 41 he connects his analogy with Nephi’s vision of the Tree of Life:

“But if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life.”

The tree that grows up inside of us is like unto the Tree of Life, which represents Jesus Christ. The standards in the FSOY are an excellent guide as we daily tend to and nurture the mustard seed of faith, and it is because of Jesus Christ that that tiny seed can become the celestial tree that it is destined to be.

In D&C 97:9 this idea is brought home beautifully with these words:

“For I, the Lord, will cause them to bring forth as a very fruitful tree which is planted in a goodly land, by a pure stream, that yieldeth much precious fruit.”

May such be the result of our daily efforts to live by these wonderful standards, which I wholeheartedly commend to each of you.

In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.