

The Articles of Faith

Much has been written of late relative to the origin, history, and importance of the Articles of Faith,¹ but one item, which is worthy of a note, has been left untreated: the changing of the wording of the fourth Article from how Joseph Smith had published it in 1842.

The Articles of Faith were written as a simple attempt to summarize for non-Mormons the LDS position on contemporary religious issues. For sixty years (1842–1902) the wording of the fourth Article remained unchanged by those who printed it.

The fourth Article of Faith, with its original wording, had served as an explanation for the third Article, which stands unchanged, and which reads: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and *ordinances* of the Gospel” (Pearl of Great Price; italics added).

The fourth Article enumerated what those ordinances were: “We believe that these ordinances are First, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; Second, Repentance; Third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; Fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.”² Thus, the fourth Article of Faith categorized faith, repentance, baptism, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost as all being ordinances.

1. Of particular significance is an excellent treatise by Edward J. Brandt entitled “The Articles of Faith: Origin and Importance,” *Proceedings: The Pearl of Great Price Symposium* (Provo: College of Religious Instruction, 1975), pp. 69–77. See also James R. Clark, “Our Pearl of Great Price: From Mission Pamphlet to Standard Work,” *Ensign* 6 (August 1976):12–17; and T. Edgar Lyon, “Doctrinal Development of the Church During the Nauvoo Sojourn: 1839–1846,” *BYU Studies* 15 (Summer 1975):435–56.

2. *The Pearl of Great Price: Being a Selection from the Revelation, Translations and Narrations of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Latter-day Saint Printing and Publishing Establishment, 1878), p. 63.

On 29 November 1893, James E. Talmage, who was then directing and teaching a special theological class in connection with the LDS College in Salt Lake City,³ met with President Wilford Woodruff, George Q. Cannon, Joseph F. Smith, and three of the Quorum of the Twelve in the Salt Lake Temple to discuss, among other things, the changing of the wording of the fourth Article.

In his journal for 29 November 1893 Talmage writes—

I brought before the Presidency, asking for rulings, the following subjects: 1. The changing of Article 4 of the Articles of Faith from the old form:

4. We believe that these ordinances are: First, Faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins: fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

so as to designate faith and repentance in some other way than as ordinances which they are not. The following form was adopted [and authorized to be taught].

4. We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: (1) Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; (2) Repentance; (3) Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; (4) Laying on of Hands for the Gift of the Holy Ghost.⁴

The change was first published in the 1902 edition of the Pearl of Great Price, and inasmuch as Brother Talmage had already been assigned to divide the Pearl of Great Price into chapters and verses and to add cross-references, the body of scripture was presented in its new form, including the new wording of the fourth Article for a sustaining vote in April Conference of 1902.

Whether or not faith and repentance are ordinances or principles or both presents an interesting problem. It may be that they could be considered both. For instance, Joseph Smith declared in the *History of the Church* that faith, repentance, baptism, and the laying on of hands were principles,⁵ but in the *Times and Seasons* he indicated that all four of them were ordinances.⁶ The Oxford English Dictionary attests an 1842 usage of the word ordinance under which faith and repentance could appropriately be called

3. James R. Talmage, *The Talmage Story: Life of James E. Talmage—Educator, Scientist, Apostle* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1972), pp. 155–57. James E. Talmage was not yet a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

4. James E. Talmage, Journal, 1893, p. 105, handwritten manuscript, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

5. Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 6:57.

6. *Times and Seasons* 3 (1 March 1842) :709.

ordinances,⁷ but apparently by 1893 such usage was ambiguous and the change was authorized and made.

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7. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “ordinance,” def. 5b.