

**ORDINANCES AND COVENANTS:
THE TIES THAT BIND**
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A few years ago, I was scanning the obituaries in a local newspaper and came across one that was particularly expressive of the love that family members had for their deceased father. It was obvious that the family circle was one in which parents and children enjoyed warm, loving relationships and the father had been at the center. The obituary concluded with this statement, "We look forward to being with you again, Dad." I then noticed that the funeral was being held in a church not of our faith.

Initially, I was taken aback. I knew that the church in question did not teach that families would be together in the eternities. And yet I understood how natural the feelings and desires of the family were. One could tell from the statements that this family had developed bonds of love that they did not expect to be broken. It was obvious that they hoped for and even expected the familial joys of this life to exist in the world to come. I wondered then and have wondered since about the relationships they will have in the hereafter. I suspect they will be close as they inherit a realm of glory. But the reality will be different from their expectations unless they find and embrace the gospel.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught two powerful truths. The first is "that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory" (D&C 130:2). This statement refers to the faithful who inherit the celestial kingdom. The second is that family relationships

are preserved through faithful adherence to gospel truths combined with the sealing ordinance of the temple. The Lord revealed that unless “a man [and woman] . . . enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage] . . . they cannot be enlarged, but remain separately and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity . . .” (D&C 131:2, 132:17). In other words, ordinances influence the relationships we have both in this world and in the world to come.

As President Henry B. Eyring stated in a recent general conference, “. . . it is through the Church and the ordinances which are in it that the blessings of the sealing power reach into the spirit world. . . . It is the sealing power and our knowledge of it which changes and transforms our family life here and our expectations for the joy of family life in the world to come.”¹

As I read the obituary, I doubted if the family knew of these powerful truths and the sacred rites of the temple. My hope then and now is that they will learn about and embrace the restored gospel and its priesthood ordinances. Righteous living and the ordinances will help them realize their hopes for the future.

In the Father’s plan of salvation, eternal progress is achieved through faithful adherence to gospel principles and acceptance of priesthood ordinances. Why are the ordinances so important? Ordinances are critical because they have the power to change our nature, to change us from telestial to celestial beings. The Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph that “in the ordinances thereof [i.e., the ordinances of the Melchizedek Priesthood], the power of godliness is manifest.

¹ Henry B. Eyring, “The True and Living Church,” *Ensign*, May, 2008, 21.

And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh” (D&C 84:20–21).

From the beginning, the Father has used priesthood ordinances and covenants to build relationships with His children and to prepare them to return to His presence. One of the earliest taught to man was the law of sacrifice. Soon after Adam and Eve entered mortality, the Lord spoke to them and commanded that they should offer the firstlings of their flocks as an offering unto the Lord. The scriptures state: “Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord” (Moses 5:5). Later, an angel appeared unto Adam and asked, “Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me. And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth” (Moses 5:6–7).

Through the ordinance, Adam was not only taught the meaning and purpose of the Savior’s atonement, but received blessings that would change his life. He learned that the Lord should come first, that he should seek the kingdom of God before all else. The ordinance taught him humility, unselfishness, and a love for God. Covenants were an integral part of the sacrificial ordinance. Through the sacrifice, Adam expressed his faith in the Lord and his obedience. In return, God gave Adam, just as he did Abel, a witness of his righteousness and acceptance with the Lord (Hebrews 11:4).

Adam also participated in the ordinance of baptism (see Moses 6:52–53). Again, these ordinances brought to Adam and Eve the power to change their lives. The power emanating from priesthood ordinances is real, not imaginary. This power

combined with the Holy Spirit transforms men's hearts and orchestrates a rebirth. The Prophet Joseph Smith said that the process of "being born again comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances."² When a person is prepared, participation in an ordinance is a spiritually transforming experience.

Each ordinance of salvation and exaltation includes covenants that activate the Lord's blessings as we abide our portion of the contract.

Ordinances

What is an ordinance? Elder Bruce R. McConkie differentiates between two types. The first type he calls "ordinance-commandments." These are all of God's decrees, laws, commandments, statutes, and judgments. The Lord revealed to the Prophet Brigham Young that the Saints are "to keep all the commandments and statutes of the Lord our God. . . . And this shall be our covenant—that we will walk in all the ordinances of the Lord" (D&C 136:2, 4). As Elder McConkie states, this is "the larger circle of ordinances."³

The small circle consists of rites and ceremonies within the gospel such as baptism, laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, the sacrament, priesthood ordinations, temple ceremonies, etc. Most ordinances are essential for salvation and exaltation. The blessing of children and dedication of graves are given for the comfort and encouragement of the Saints.⁴

² *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith, 172.

³ Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, Bookcraft Inc., Salt Lake City, Utah, 1958, 496.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 496.

Covenants

As stated earlier, the ordinances pertaining to salvation and exaltation include covenants as an integral part of the ceremony. Gospel covenants are agreements, contracts, or mutual promises between God and His children. Since gospel covenants originate with an all-wise God, He sets the terms and conditions of the contract. As we perform the ceremonies, we make covenants with Him in an exchange of promises.

The “new and everlasting covenant” is the fullness of the restored gospel and includes all of the covenants God has made with man and, therefore, all of the mutual promises between Him and man.

In order to appreciate the relationship between ordinances and covenants and understand the “power of godliness” inherent in them, we will examine three types of ordinances.

Baptism

The first is baptism, an ordinance of salvation. The Savior told Nicodemus that “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). One might ask, “Why is baptism necessary to enter God’s kingdom, and what is the ‘power of godliness’ in baptism?”

The “godly power” in baptism is the power to cleanse, the power to make clean. Baptism provides a conduit for one’s faith and repentance to access the Lord’s atoning powers of mercy and forgiveness. Cleanliness is an essential condition for entry into heaven. As the Lord taught Moses, “Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there” (Moses 6:57).

Thus, baptism is essential because it activates the Lord's atoning power in our lives to remove the stain of sin and opens the gate into the celestial kingdom. In the words of Isaiah, "... though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). Cleansing is essential, as it prepares us to be made holy, to be purified or sanctified.

Through its cleansing power, baptism prepares one to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit brings the baptism of fire by which our sins are burned away (see 2 Nephi 31:13-14).

It is important to note the covenants associated with baptism. What do we as mortals promise God when we are baptized? First, baptism is a symbol of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Through baptism we express our faith in Jesus Christ and His atonement. We promise that we will take upon us His name and "come into the fold of God." We commit to increase our faith through righteous living and repentance. We commit to "bear one another's burdens . . . to mourn with those that mourn . . . to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places" (Mosiah 18:8-9).

What are the promises God makes to us when we are baptized? First, he promises to apply the atoning blood of Christ and cleanse us from sin as we exercise faith in the Father and the Son and repent. The Savior promises to draw us to Him, to redeem and sanctify us through the Holy Ghost that we may be lifted up by the Father and changed into celestial beings (see 3 Nephi 27:14). He promises to number us "with those of the first resurrection, that [we] may have eternal life" (Mosiah 18:9).

What an incredible set of promises baptism puts in place! Baptism opens the gate and puts us on a path leading to the celestial kingdom. Baptism by water and by the Spirit has the godly power to cleanse.

With the gift of the Holy Ghost come other powers as well. The Holy Ghost has the power to guide us into truth, the power to sanctify us and change us into holy people, the power to comfort and teach, the power to testify that Jesus is the Christ. Faithfulness on our part, coupled with these ordinances, puts us on the strait and narrow path leading to the presence of God.

Priesthood Ordination

The next ordinance to be examined is the priesthood ordination. What are the powers conferred in a priesthood ordination? It depends on the office! As we know, priesthood is the power of God delegated to man to act in His behalf.

In its fulness, the priesthood contains all of the powers God has seen fit to delegate, including those of the temple ordinances. The priesthood has the power to direct the affairs of God's kingdom on earth, the power to administer the ordinances to others. It has the power to bless and heal both physically and spiritually. It has the power to command the elements. Above all, the priesthood has the power to bind a man and a woman and their children into a family unit beyond the veil.

What are the covenants associated with the priesthood ordination? Man promises to live a faithful life and to "magnify" his calling, to use his priesthood to bless others. He promises to honor and sustain those called by the Lord to

direct the kingdom. He promises to receive Christ as his Savior and the Father as the God of all (D&C 33:37).

What are Deity's promises in the priesthood covenant? He promises the faithful man that he will become a son of Moses and Abraham and the elect of God. As such, they become inheritors of the promises made to the patriarchs and the prophets. Ultimately, the Father promises to make man a king and a priest to receive all that the Father has (D&C 84:38; 76:56).

Temple Ordinances

The ordinances associated with the temple constitute the third area we will review. President Gordon B. Hinckley was not only the great temple builder of this dispensation, but was intimately acquainted with the ordinances. He was selected in the 1950s by President David O. McKay to develop an approach that could be used in presenting the temple ordinances in temples that serve many languages. He directed the work that led to the films first used in the New Zealand and Swiss temples. Today's presentation of the endowment is based on his work.

At the beginning of his ministry as prophet, President Hinckley stated that the temple, and "ordinances administered therein, represent the ultimate in our worship" and "the most profound expressions of our theology."⁵ It is interesting to me that such profound expressions have been lost to most of Christianity even though there are numerous references to them in the scriptures. Temples and temple work are among the great evidences of the Apostasy and the need for a restoration of the gospel. Nineteenth-century Christendom

⁵ Gordon B. Hinckley, "Of Missions, Temples, and Stewardship," *Ensign*, November 1995, 52-53.

had few doctrines or practices like it. As I have wondered why there was so little knowledge of temple ordinances in the Christian world, I have come to the conclusion that the world knows little about them because these truths were among the first to be lost. Temple ordinances and the doctrine associated with them were lost very early in the Apostasy. Temples and temple ordinances are the direct prerogative of the prophet who heads the Church. Peter, James, and John participated in the transfer of these keys from the prophet Elijah (see Matthew 16:18–20, 17:1–3, 18:18; John 1:14). Once the apostles were gone, these keys were withdrawn and associated ordinances effectively ceased.

In fact, the Apostle John, the last apostle in the meridian of time, tried to forestall the Apostasy and reclaim members of the seven churches in Asia by reminding them of the blessings of priesthood ordinances. He wrote the following to them:

And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Revelation 1:5–6).

It is clear that John used the blessings that come from baptism and the temple to remind the Saints of what they will give up if they continue in their wayward pursuits. Unfortunately, most of the people in these branches had become apostate and did not respond to his plea. Within a short time, all of the apostles were gone, and temple work with them.

Just as baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the priesthood are meant to bring us to Christ, so the main purpose of the temple is to sanctify and prepare us to stand in the presence of the Father and the Son and to create eternal families.

Temple ordinances instruct us in the purposes of the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. From them we learn why this earth was created, why we are here, and what lies beyond the veil. They are the most sacred ceremonies on earth.

Again we ask, “What is the power in these ordinances and what are the covenants associated with the temple?” Although we do not talk about the ordinances outside the temple, there are some general statements that can be made with regard to the power in temple ordinances and the blessings that flow from them.

First, baptism opens a gate that puts us on a path into the celestial kingdom. As we travel this strait and narrow path, we eventually come to a fork in the road and additional choices are required. These choices involve the temple. If we choose to enter the temple and partake of its ordinances, another gate is opened which leads to an even higher path. Faithful adherence to temple ordinances, including the sealing ordinance of marriage, leads to the highest degree of the celestial kingdom. Without the highest ordinances, a person inherits a lower degree (see D&C 131:1–4).

Temple ordinances have additional powers. These powers include cleansing, the power to resist Satan’s temptations, an increased sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, the power to discern truth, blessings of health, the power to

sanctify, the power to make us “kings and priests unto God,” the power to bind men, women, and children into families forever (Revelation 1:6; D&C 132:19). Through temple ordinances, we are promised the power of eternal increase in the resurrection (D&C 131:4, 132:19). Temple ordinances bring a “fulness of the Holy Ghost,” a “fulness of the priesthood,” and a “fullness of . . . glory” (D&C 109:15, 124:28, 132:6, 19).

In order to receive these blessings, we promise to be faithful and loyal to the Lord, to be faithful to our companions, to dedicate our lives as individuals and as families to the building up of the kingdom of God on earth. We promise to become a Zion people with the “fire of the covenant” burning within us.⁶

Faith, Power, and Hope in the Ordinances

One of the ways in which the doctrine and the ordinances bring power into our lives is through the hope they engender. A few months ago in a sacrament meeting, a priesthood leader shared an experience he had as a young missionary in Brazil. As I listened, the Spirit reconfirmed my feelings of the power, of the hope, of the faith that comes with an understanding of the gospel plan and its priesthood ordinances.

While serving in Brazil, the young missionary and his companion met a wonderful young family who were second-generation Japanese-Brazilians. They had three young children at the time and invited the missionaries into their home.

On the third discussion, the missionaries began teaching them about the Savior’s atonement, the resurrection and the

⁶ Brigham Young, *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, September 28, 1846, 5.

plan of salvation. During the presentation, the mother began to cry. Initially, the missionaries were concerned that they had offended her in some way and inquired as to her problem. She then shared the following story.

Their first child was a beautiful little girl who had brought joy and happiness into their young married life. Suddenly, she became sick and died, and they were heartbroken. A year after the death and burial of the young child, the couple received a notice that the cemetery was being moved and that they would have to retrieve and relocate the casket. Because of the mother's desire to see her angel daughter one more time, she asked that the casket be opened. As she looked at her daughter's degenerated remains, she was shocked. The experience was so devastating that it destroyed any hope of a future reunion and association. Since then, she had lived in complete despair, devoid of any hope.

As the missionaries explained the plan of salvation, the mission of the Savior, and the reality of the resurrection, the mother was touched by the Spirit and became overwhelmed with gratitude and appreciation. As the couple learned more about the Savior, the blessing of eternal families, and the restoration of the sealing power, hope returned and they were baptized. When the missionary was released from his mission, the family gave him a picture of the family as a memory of the special time when hope returned to their lives.⁷

Ordinances and Spiritual Experiences

Participation in the ordinances is meant to be a spiritual experience. This is true for all ordinances, but especially for the rites of the temple. Think of the experience that the

⁷ Richard T. Jackson, letter sharing missionary experience.

children of Israel might have had as they were offered the fullness of the gospel, including the temple ordinances.

Once Moses had brought the children of Israel to the foot of Mount Sinai, the Lord called him to the top of the mountain in order to give him instructions. The Lord told Moses that if Israel would obey the covenants the Lord desired to make with them, He would cause Israel to become a “peculiar treasure . . . a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” Moses returned to the camp and called the elders of the people together and asked if they wanted to make covenants with the Lord. The people answered, “All that the Lord hath spoken we will do.” Moses returned to the Lord with the people’s report. The Lord instructed Moses as to how he should prepare the people. The Lord said, “Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, And be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai” (Exodus 19:5–11). Can you imagine the spiritual feast that was offered to Jacob’s posterity?

Moses went down from the mount and sanctified them and had them wash their clothes. On the third day, the Lord came to the top of the mount in fire. There was thundering and lightning and a thick cloud that fell upon the mount. The Lord divided the mountain into three parts: the foot, the midpoint, and the top. The children of Israel were brought to the foot of the mountain, Moses and 70 elders of Israel were called to the midpoint, and Moses again returned to the top. The mountain had become a temple.

Moses was given a pair of tablets to take down to the people. The first set contained the fullness of the gospel and the covenants the Lord wanted to make with Israel.

Unfortunately, when Moses returned, the people were worshipping a golden calf and living far below the standards set for the blessings offered. The tablets were broken and eventually Moses was given another set containing the lesser law, a schoolmaster designed to bring them to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

The lesson learned is that people need to prepare themselves and remain clean in order to receive a spiritual experience as they participate in a priesthood ordinance. Fasting and prayer are helpful in this regard. It also helps if one understands the ordinance. For example, temple ordinances are more than a story, more than instruction. They are designed for individuals to engage the Holy Spirit, to deepen their faith, and to make covenants with the Lord.

A few months ago, a sister came to the Provo Temple with a box of family file cards. As she crossed the threshold of the temple, she received an impression to look at the cards once more. There were many cards containing information on her ancestors covering a period of three hundred years. As she looked at the cards, she noticed the oldest relatives were at the bottom, with the youngest on top. The impression came to reverse the order. Her impression was that those who had waited the longest should be first. She felt a strong impression from the other side of the veil given the significance of what was about to take place.

Many years ago while fulfilling an assignment in West Africa, I met a wonderful LDS woman. She had retired from Brigham Young University and was developing a home economics program at the University of Ghana. During the summer, she told me the story of her life and her goals upon her return home.

As a young woman in her twenties, she had received a bachelor's degree from the University of Utah and had married a man from Sandy, Utah. He was a farmer and they had begun what they hoped would be a long life together. After a year or so, a young baby boy came into their home. A few months later she realized that she was expecting again. One day her husband came in from the farm very ill. Within a short time, the pain was intense and by nightfall, he had passed away. He died of a ruptured appendix.

A few months later, a second son was born. With two children to care for, Virginia Cutler knew that she had to find work. She spoke with the bishop. He told her to seek out her professors at the University of Utah and see if they had any counsel for her. As she talked with the professors, they said, "You were an excellent student. What you need is a master's degree. We believe Stanford would admit you and provide financial assistance." Sister Cutler applied and was accepted. As she told the story, she indicated that it took longer to obtain the master's degree than normal because she wanted to be with the children as much as possible. After some time she finished the degree and her professors at Stanford said, "You have done so well here we believe you should seek a PhD. It will increase your earning power. If you apply to Cornell, there is a good chance that they will admit you and provide financial assistance." Sister Cutler thought about the suggestion and decided to apply. She was accepted and aid was proffered.

Again, it took her longer than normal to finish the doctorate because she wanted to spend time with her sons. Eventually, she finished and obtained good employment. When the boys had grown, she decided to accept an assignment with the Ford Foundation in Asia and then with

other international organizations. For a few years she taught at the University of Utah and eventually became dean of the College of Family Living at BYU. Through most of her adult life, however, she had not lived near a temple and temple worship had not been a key part of her life.

One evening, just prior to her leaving Ghana, she and I had dinner with a few friends. During the evening she shared with me her goals upon returning to Provo. She said, "You know, I have not lived near a temple most of my adult life. I have just learned that the First Presidency has announced a new temple in Provo that will be completed in about three years. I have thought about my life and I now desire to become a faithful temple patron. In fact, I want to do as many endowments for my sisters on the other side of the veil as there have been weeks since I received my first temple recommend." It had been fifty years.

She returned to Provo and I spent a number of years working for international businesses and other organizations. I returned to Provo in the summer of 1980, more than a decade later. Soon after my return, I was called to be president of the Provo Utah Sharon East Stake. One of the first persons to come for a temple interview was Sister Cutler. As we finished the interview, she said, "President, do you remember our conversation that last evening in Africa? Do you remember the goal I set? I answered that I did remember and asked, "How are you doing?" She responded, "I have almost finished. I will surpass the 2,500 mark in a few weeks' time."

She then looked me straight in the eye and said, "May I share with you a special experience I had a few weeks ago? I was in the temple in an endowment session. I closed my eyes and began thinking about all of the sisters for whom I had done

the work. As I thought about them, I said to myself, 'I wonder if they know what I have been doing? I wonder if they will be on the other side of the veil to greet me when I pass on? I hope so!' And then the thought came, 'I wonder if my husband knows what I have been doing. I wonder if he has been an instrument in teaching them the gospel and preparing them for the ordinances.' She then said, "As this thought came to me, I suddenly, in my mind's eye, saw the veil part and a man's hand reach through the veil to me. It was a young man's hand. It was my husband's hand. I had not seen it for more than 60 years! I knew he was there! I knew he knew what I was doing! He had been preparing them! I believe many of them will be with him at the veil to greet me when my time comes."

Sister Cutler died a few years later. I have thought often of the wonderful assembly of sisters that greeted her. I have little doubt but what her husband was there to introduce them. What a wonderful day that must have been.

Yes, ordinances are designed to provide a spiritual experience and the blessings promised are real. The ordinances prepare us to enter the presence of Deity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is my hope that all of us will appreciate the great plan of salvation and the blessings it provides. In the Lord's perfect plan, there is opportunity for everyone, in that those who did not receive the opportunity to hear the gospel in this life are not forgotten. It behooves all of us to become saviors on Mount Zion (see Obadiah 1:21; D&C 103:9-10). Missionary work, family history, and temple work are the keys.

Everyone must partake of the ordinances in order to receive a fulness. As the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph, “.

.. in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest” (D&C 84:20). The ordinances have the power to cleanse, the power to sanctify, the power to lift us up to the Father. In the sealing ordinance, eternal families are created.

As stated earlier, the saving and exalting ordinances include covenants. If we are true to these covenants, if we do not defile our garments, the blessings offered the Saints in Sardis will be ours. The Savior will be able to say to us as He said to them, “. . . they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy” (Revelation 3:4).

It is my prayer that we will appreciate the power of priesthood ordinances and the covenants associated with them. May we undertake our family history work with even greater zeal and then perform the ordinances for them that will bring them the “power of godliness.” In doing so, we and they will “walk with [the Lord] in white.”