

# Always Retain a Remission of Your Sins

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By the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost as our constant companion, we can always retain a remission of our sins.

A profound phrase used by King Benjamin in his teachings about the Savior and His Atonement has been a recurring topic of my study and pondering for many years.

In his spiritually stirring farewell sermon to the people he had served and loved, King Benjamin described the importance of knowing the glory of God and tasting of His love, of receiving a remission of sins, of always remembering the greatness of God, and of praying daily and standing steadfastly in the faith.<sup>1</sup> He also promised that by doing these things, “ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and *always retain a remission of your sins.*”<sup>2</sup>

My message focuses upon the principle of always retaining a remission of our sins. The truth expressed in this phrase can strengthen our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and deepen our discipleship. I pray the Holy Ghost will inspire and edify us as we consider together essential spiritual truths.

## Spiritual Rebirth

In mortality we experience physical birth and the opportunity for spiritual rebirth.<sup>3</sup> We are admonished by prophets and apostles to awake unto God,<sup>4</sup> be “born again,”<sup>5</sup> and become new creatures in Christ<sup>6</sup> by receiving in our lives the blessings made possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. The “merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah”<sup>7</sup> can help us triumph over the self-centered and selfish tendencies of the natural man and become more selfless, benevolent, and saintly. We are exhorted to so live that we can “stand spotless before [the Lord] at the last day.”<sup>8</sup>

# The Holy Ghost and Priesthood Ordinances

The Prophet Joseph Smith summarized succinctly the essential role of priesthood ordinances in the gospel of Jesus Christ: "Being born again, comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances."<sup>9</sup> This penetrating statement emphasizes the roles of both the Holy Ghost and sacred ordinances in the process of spiritual rebirth.

The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead. He is a personage of spirit and bears witness of all truth. In the scriptures, the Holy Ghost is referred to as the Comforter,<sup>10</sup> a teacher,<sup>11</sup> and a revelator.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, the Holy Ghost is a sanctifier<sup>13</sup> who cleanses and burns dross and evil out of human souls as though by fire.

Holy ordinances are central in the Savior's gospel and in the process of coming unto Him and seeking spiritual rebirth. Ordinances are sacred acts that have spiritual purpose, eternal significance, and are related to God's laws and statutes.<sup>14</sup> All saving ordinances and the ordinance of the sacrament must be authorized by one who holds the requisite priesthood keys.

The ordinances of salvation and exaltation administered in the Lord's restored Church are far more than rituals or symbolic performances. Rather, they constitute authorized channels through which the blessings and powers of heaven can flow into our individual lives.

"And this greater priesthood administereth the gospel and holdeth the key of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the key of the knowledge of God.

"Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest.

"And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is not manifest unto men in the flesh."<sup>15</sup>

Ordinances received and honored with integrity are essential to obtaining the power of godliness and all of the blessings made available through the Savior's Atonement.

## Obtaining and Retaining a Remission of Sins through Ordinances

To comprehend more fully the process whereby we may obtain and always

to comprehend more fully the process whereby we may obtain and always retain a remission of our sins, we need first to understand the inseparable relationship among three sacred ordinances that provide access to the powers of heaven: baptism by immersion, laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the sacrament.

Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins “is the introductory ordinance of the gospel”<sup>16</sup> of Jesus Christ and must be preceded by faith in the Savior and by sincere repentance. This ordinance “is a sign and a commandment which God has set for [His children] to enter into His kingdom.”<sup>17</sup> Baptism is administered in the authority of the Aaronic Priesthood. In the process of coming unto the Savior and spiritual rebirth, baptism provides a necessary *initial cleansing* of our soul from sin.

The baptismal covenant includes three fundamental commitments: (1) to be willing to take upon ourselves the name of Jesus Christ, (2) to always remember Him, and (3) to keep His commandments. The promised blessing for honoring this covenant is “that [we] may always have his Spirit to be with [us].”<sup>18</sup> Thus, baptism is the essential preparation to receive the authorized opportunity for the constant companionship of the third member of the Godhead.

“Baptism [by] water ... must be followed by baptism of the Spirit in order to be complete.”<sup>19</sup> As the Savior taught Nicodemus, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”<sup>20</sup>

Three statements by the Prophet Joseph Smith emphasize the vital linkage between the ordinances of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Statement 1: “Baptism is a holy ordinance preparatory to the reception of the Holy Ghost; it is the channel and key by which the Holy Ghost will be administered.”<sup>21</sup>

Statement 2: “You might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man, if not done in view of the remission of sins and getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>22</sup>

Statement 3: “The baptism of water, without the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost attending it, is of no use. They are necessarily and inseparably connected.”<sup>23</sup>

The consistent connectedness among the principle of repentance, the ordinances of baptism and receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the glorious

blessing of the remission of sins is emphasized repeatedly in the scriptures.

Nephi declared, "For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; *and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.*"<sup>24</sup>

The Savior Himself proclaimed, "Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me and be baptized in my name, *that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost*, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day."<sup>25</sup>

Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost is an ordinance administered in the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood. In the process of coming unto the Savior and spiritual rebirth, receiving the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost in our lives creates the possibility of an *ongoing cleansing* of our soul from sin. This joyous blessing is vital because "no unclean thing can dwell with God."<sup>26</sup>

As members of the Lord's restored Church, we are blessed both by our *initial cleansing from sin* associated with baptism and by the potential for an *ongoing cleansing from sin* made possible through the companionship and power of the Holy Ghost—even the third member of the Godhead.

Consider how a farmer depends upon the unchanging pattern of planting and harvesting. Understanding the connection between sowing and reaping is a constant source of purpose and influences all of the decisions and actions a farmer undertakes in all seasons of the year. In like manner, the inseparable connection between the ordinances of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost should impact every aspect of our discipleship in all seasons of our lives.

The sacrament is the third ordinance necessary to obtain access to the power of godliness. That we might more fully keep ourselves unspotted from the world, we are commanded to go to the house of prayer and offer up our sacraments upon the Lord's holy day.<sup>27</sup> Please consider that the emblems of the Lord's body and blood, the bread and the water, are both blessed and sanctified. "O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread [or this water] to the souls of all those who partake [or drink] of it."<sup>28</sup> To sanctify is to make pure and holy. The sacramental emblems are sanctified in remembrance of Christ's purity, of our total dependence upon His Atonement, and of our responsibility to so honor our ordinances and covenants that we can "stand spotless before [Him] at the last day."<sup>29</sup>

The ordinance of the sacrament is a holy and repeated invitation to repent sincerely and to be renewed spiritually. The act of partaking of the sacrament in

sincerely and to be renewed spiritually. The act of partaking of the sacrament, in and of itself, does not remit sins. But as we prepare conscientiously and participate in this holy ordinance with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, then the promise is that we may *always* have the Spirit of the Lord to be with us. And by the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost as our constant companion, we can *always* retain a remission of our sins.

We truly are blessed each week by the opportunity to evaluate our lives through the ordinance of the sacrament, to renew our covenants, and to receive this covenant promise.<sup>30</sup>

## Baptized Again

Sometimes Latter-day Saints express the wish that they could be baptized again—and thereby become as clean and worthy as the day on which they received their first saving gospel ordinance. May I respectfully suggest that our Heavenly Father and His Beloved Son do not intend for us to experience such a feeling of spiritual renewal, refreshment, and restoration just once in our lives. The blessings of obtaining and always retaining a remission of our sins through gospel ordinances help us understand that baptism is a point of departure in our mortal spiritual journey; it is not a destination we should yearn to revisit over and over again.

The ordinances of baptism by immersion, the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the sacrament are not isolated and discrete events; rather, they are elements in an interrelated and additive pattern of redemptive progress. Each successive ordinance elevates and enlarges our spiritual purpose, desire, and performance. The Father's plan, the Savior's Atonement, and the ordinances of the gospel provide the grace we need to press forward and progress line upon line and precept upon precept toward our eternal destiny.

## Promise and Testimony

We are imperfect human beings striving to live in mortality according to Heavenly Father's perfect plan of eternal progression. The requirements of His plan are glorious, merciful, and rigorous. We may at times be filled with determination and at other times feel totally inadequate. We may wonder if we spiritually can ever fulfill the commandment to stand spotless before Him at the last day.

With the help of the Lord and through the power of His Spirit to "teach [us] all things,"<sup>31</sup> indeed we can be blessed to realize our spiritual possibilities.

Ordinances invite spiritual purpose and power into our lives as we strive to be born again and become men and women of Christ.<sup>32</sup> Our weaknesses can be strengthened, and our limitations can be overcome.

Although none of us can achieve perfection in this life, we can become increasingly worthy and spotless as we are “cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.”<sup>33</sup> I promise and testify we will be blessed with increased faith in the Savior and greater spiritual assurance as we seek to always retain a remission of our sins and, ultimately, to stand spotless before the Lord at the last day. I so witness in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.