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## THE ORDINANCES

The word “ordinances” appears only once in the gospels (see Luke 1:6). It appears a few times in the epistles but not always in a commendable manner (see Romans 13:2; Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 9:10; 1 Peter 2:13). In the first and the last of these references, ordinances of civil authorities are in the minds of the writers. When the first two verses of Romans 13 are read from the Inspired Version, the Church appears to have ordinances such as civil governments have.

Paul’s seeming denunciation of some ordinances should not be taken to mean that there were no ordinances in the Church of Christ. As there is government in the Church, there must be something of God ordained for that government to do. The Church on earth has always been pictured as militant, and as such she needs “helps.” These helps are imparted spiritually and on some occasions in a ceremonial manner known under the term of ordinances. The difficulty with the Jews was that they took the ordinances of God and made them the end. Paul saw the ordinances, as well as the whole of the Mosaic law, acting as a veil in obscuring Christ from men (see 2 Corinthians 3:14-16). In this sense only were the ordinances denounced.

When Luke writes about Zacharias and Elizabeth “walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord” (Luke 1:6), they were rightfully enacting that which divine authority gave them. The ordinances of the gospel are that part of the teaching of our Lord which catches the eye but also has a deep spiritual meaning affecting our moral conduct. Such doctrines as baptism, the laying on of hands, and the sacrament of the Lord’s supper are ordinances. They are ceremonial in nature, but underlying the ceremony there is a spiritual force influencing our behavior.

With the coming of the Reformation, there arose a heated debate between the old and established religion and the new reformers concerning the meaning and value of the sacraments. Even the reformers held different views, and the meaning of the ordinances suffered considerably.

Knowing of the confusion which existed in the theological world, it is with pleasure that we read in latter-day revelation of the value of the ordinances (see D&C 1:3d, 52:4c-d, 53:2b, 64:2a, 83:3, 104:8-10, 107:13f, 122:3a). It is extremely doubtful that Joseph Smith was acquainted with this theological debate over the meaning of the ordinances and sacraments. Without divine help, he could not have delivered these instructions.

“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” (D&C 83:3c). From this statement it is clear that having priesthood is a prerequisite to the performance of ordinances.

Man is a needy creature. Christ was God’s answer to this universal need. As the Redeemer, He had a message; and the message is just as important as the Messenger (see Matthew 7:3ff; John 1:1-5, 3:1-16, 12:46ff). To carry this message to the world and administer its ordinances, He called certain men from among His disciples, ordained them, and sent them forth (see Matthew 10:1-5, 28:16-19; Mark 16:12-18; John 15:16). The qualifications of these men were compassion (see Hebrews 5:1-3) and godly life (see Psalm 4:1-3). God calls such men today through His Holy Spirit (see John 15:16; Acts 13:1-3; Hebrews 5:4). Because of their compassion for their fellow men and also because of their godliness, the power of God becomes manifested through them when the ordinances are performed.

Who are the ones who receive the benefit of religion? The answer is simple: the needy who go to the Savior with complete humility and self-surrender. Through repentance, these men make their return. When we see such an individual going into the waters of baptism, we should not think of him as a man simply being immersed. If we do that, we miss the meaning and value of the ordinance. What we should see is a man who was once filled with fears and the perplexities of life. We should see him as he once frantically tried to drown the pains of his fears in such escape measures as the pursuit of happiness through the accumulation of wealth or the gratification of his carnal nature with intoxicants, sports, sex, and the like—only to find himself in greater misery.

But now he has found the true Physician through faith; and in humility he is going through the waters of regeneration, vowing all to the service of his new Master. Baptism to him is the promise of godly life, and with it comes the manifestation of God through the remission of sins. Forgiveness is a most thrilling experience. It releases man from his old self and turns his energies in a completely different direction—the building of the Kingdom of God on earth. Through the ordinance of baptism the power of godliness is manifested in forgiveness, and a new creature is born.

It is anticipated that from this moment on, the life of this individual would be a godly one that carries out the teachings of the Lord. But let us not be guilty of the thought that the carrying out of instruction is enough. These instructions must be intelligently obeyed in the spirit of humility, dependence, and love. We have to continue to be children crying out, “Our Father” and not “My Father.” This means that we have brothers toward whom we have responsibilities. The godly man is one who is aware of the peril surrounding him and would say, like Paul, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

When combining the two—the compassionate and godly life of the minister and the penitent, godly life of the one ministered to—power will be manifested. This power in latter-day revelation is referred to as the “power of godliness” (D&C 83:3c). In the face of our accumulated knowledge in physical sciences and arts, this statement is not surprising. As there is power in studiousness, cleanliness, etc., so there is in godliness.

An example of this is our automobile. The battery is there to give us the first turnover—the start. But we cannot drive on the battery very long. A car also has a mechanism called the generator or alternator. As we drive, the generator is working quietly and storing power in the battery for the time of need. The same thing is true in the Christian life. By the power of God, we were brought to Him and His Church. As we live our lives in a godly way, we are storing power against the time of need. Perils will attack us. This is where the ordinances become important, for it is through them that the power of godliness is made manifest. As the godly man participates in the ordinances, with the servant of God, there comes the power of Christ. Remember: “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

These ordinances require the use of the hands. This is true of baptisms and the administering of the Lord’s Supper as well as of the more obvious ones such as the blessing of children or administering to the sick. To those who do not believe in the ordinances, the reference to hands is something that borders on the ridiculous. They fail to recognize that the hand demonstrates that which words cannot. A good, warm handshake conveys a feeling of friendship which words are not able to express. A clenched fist tells us something else, and so do folded arms.

Here is an example of what the blessing of children means to godly parents. After they came in contact with this message, they endeavored to live godly lives. When they were married, they began to look for progeny; and their lives of prayer were directed to that end. After a child was given, what should be their first thought? God gave them the child, and to Him the child belongs. They are only stewards or guardians over it. Part of their prayer was answered, but that part of the child’s life which lies in the future is still the object of prayer.

Only God can make this life meaningful. Consequently, the parents follow the example set by our Lord and take the child to be blessed. Why? Because they recognize God’s calling behind the elder and witness his godly life. Behind his hands and his words is the power of God. Also, they realize their own importance in dealing with the many needs of their child, and they ask God to bless them so they may continue in this stewardship. They ask that the life of the child may be protected by Him. To some, the act may be simply cute; but to the minister, because of his compassion, the occasion is serious. To the parents, it is a moment of thanksgiving as well as help in the guidance they need so much.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Name five ordinances within the Church.
2. How does an ordinance differ from a sacrament?
3. What is the relationship of priesthood to ordinances?
4. In order for godliness to be made manifest through the ordinances, there must be a combination

of what factors? What two (or more) individuals have to be involved? What kind of individuals must they be for maximum power?

5. Why did Paul once seem to denounce all ordinances? Did he mean to do away with them?
6. What does modern-day revelation have to say about the power of godliness manifested in the flesh? What does it involve?
7. Who benefits most from the gospel of Christ?