

# Ordinances

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The responsibility involved in speaking to this large gathering of university students has been a matter of great concern to me since the invitation came. The music has helped a great deal. I am grateful for these lovely sisters, these missionaries, who have inspired us at the beginning of this meeting.

Do you remember how nervous and unsettled you felt when you were asked to give a two-and-a-half-minute talk or you were asked to give a Sunday School lesson? If you think those of us who are called to the presiding councils of the Church are free from that anxiety, you are misinformed.

In your mind, come and stand beside me here at the pulpit for a moment. Look out upon the thousands and thousands of young people assembled in this audience. Do you sense the weight of the responsibility? Do you feel the pressure? I have talked to venerable presidents of the Church, more than one of them, and have been told that even they are not free from that deep feeling of concern.

You should take comfort in the knowledge that in your anxiety and feeling of inadequacy you are not alone. Those far ahead of you in years and experience, and those carrying the weight of authority far beyond that which you carry now, are not free from it—ever.

But lest you be discouraged, remember this. When we have prepared the best we can and tried the best we know how, there is a source of great spiritual power, adequate indeed, that will counterbalance our inadequacies and shortcomings and, if we are worthy, will make us better than we are. And on that I rely now.

I have considered what would be of most worth to you in a time that is very unsettled. I have a great desire to be informative rather than entertaining. Therefore, my talk will not be like a dessert. It will be more like a main course that you will relish to the degree that you are hungry for basic information.

I quote some deep wisdom from a first-grade student who said to his teacher, “Do we have to do what we want to do again today? We don’t want to be taught to play, we want to be taught to learn.”

What I say will have interest to you, I think, to the degree that you want to be “taught” to

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learn and to the degree that you want to know what you ought to know.

I want to talk to you about *ordinances*. Nothing I say will be new. It may be arranged—and that is my hope—in such a way that you will see something in the subject beyond what you have seen before.

I begin with the third Article of Faith: “We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and *ordinances* of the Gospel.” (Italics added.)

The Oxford Dictionary gives as the first definition of the word *ordinance*, “Arrangement in ranks or rows,” and as the second definition, “Arrangement in sequence or proper relative position.” That may not strike you at the moment as having much religious significance, but indeed it has. The word *ordinance* also means “a religious or ceremonial observance, an established rite.”

Among the ordinances we perform in the Church are baptism, administering the sacrament, naming and blessing of infants, administering to the sick, setting apart to callings in the Church, and ordaining to offices in the priesthood. And then there are the higher ordinances, performed in the temples. These include the endowment and the sealing ordinance, spoken of generally as temple marriage.

The word *ordinance* comes from the word *order*, which means, again, “a rank, a row, a series.”

The word *order* appears very frequently in the scriptures. I’ll just give a few examples: “. . . established the *order* of the Church” (Alma 8:1). “. . . all things should be restored to their proper *order*” (Alma 41:2). Moroni even defined depravity as being “without *order*” (Moroni 9:18). “. . . all things may be done in *order*” (D&C 20:68). “Mine house is a house of *order*” (D&C 132:8).

We talk often in the Church about the order of the priesthood.

The third word, *ordain*, is a close relative to the other two words. It has as its first definition from the Oxford Dictionary, “To put in order, arrange, make ready, prepare”; and as its second definition, “To appoint or admit to the ministry of the Christian Church . . . by the laying on of hands or other symbolic action.”

From all of this dictionary work there comes the impression that an ordinance, to be valid, must be done in proper order.

*Order, Ordain, Ordinance!*

*Order*—To put in ranks or rows, in proper sequence or relationship.

*Ordain*—The process of putting things in rows or proper relationship.

*Ordinance*—The ceremony by which things are put in proper order.

Now, about the ordinances of the gospel. How important are they to you as young members of the Church? Can you be happy, can you be redeemed, can you be exalted without them?

The answer: They are more than advisable or desirable, or even necessary. More, even, than essential or vital, they are *crucial* to each of us.

We learn from the revelations that

*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. [D&C 84:19–21; italics added]*

It is my purpose to fix in your minds so serious an interest in the ordinances of the gospel that you will seek to qualify for each ordinance in proper sequence, to make and keep the covenants that are connected with them, and to make sure that everything in this regard, for you, is in proper order.

Consider this illustration.

Suppose an agent came to you with a real bargain in insurance. He claims that his policy offers complete protection. He talks of generous coverage, very low premiums, no penalties for making a claim—even a heavy claim. Other features make the policy look better than any you have considered before. He tells you of the company he claims to represent. You know it to be very reputable. You study the policy and find more offered to you, with less required of you, than any policy you have looked at before. You check carefully on the company and come away satisfied that they are indeed reputable. They do stand behind their policies. Some of your friends have dealt with them for years and have always been satisfied. You, it appears, have found a real bargain.

But in this imaginary account there is one thing that you did not discover, one hitch. This agent was never hired by that company. They have not authorized him to represent them. The company is not even aware that he is using their name. He obtained copies of the policy and adjusted it to give it a little wider appeal. He had some forms and letterheads printed and set himself up in business. When he writes a policy and collects the premiums, they do not go to the head office. The policy goes into a drawer somewhere, and the premium money into his pocket. Chances are, he figures, there will be no claim against the policy anyway, at least not while he is around. And since it is life insurance, certainly there will be no claim while the policyholder is around.

You have, as the expression goes, been sold a bill of goods. For all you know, you are well insured. You feel content and suppose that when the day comes, as it surely will, your claim will be paid.

Too bad for you! No doubt the company will reject your claim. They cannot be compelled to honor policies except those written by authorized agents whom they have hired and

certified, no matter *how* convinced you were that this man was a bona fide agent.

Will you get sympathy? Oh yes. Full value of the policy? Not a chance! Would you not receive anything? Well, for as long as you didn't know the difference you felt secure, for whatever that is worth.

My wife has an aged aunt in Brigham City. She is the last of fourteen children. Perhaps seventy-five years ago, Millicent took her little brothers and sisters to town to see the Peach Days Parade. With excitement they walked the long way to town. They hadn't been there long when a horse-drawn water wagon came along, sprinkling the streets to settle the dust. They watched it in awe and were greatly impressed. When it had passed they went home. They thought the parade was over. They were quite satisfied, until they learned the difference.

If you had been sold the insurance policy we talked about, you might be quite complacent, thinking you were well insured. But oh my, how that gets reversed. Somewhere in later conversations would come the sermon, "You ought to have been more careful about where you put your trust. You should have checked more carefully."

Now let me apply this illustration to the ordinances of the gospel.

There are no discounts. No credit buying. Nothing is ever put on sale at special, reduced prices. There is never something for nothing. There is no such thing as a "bargain." You pay full value. Requirements and covenants are involved. And you will get, in due time, full value. But you must, positively must, deal with an authorized agent, or your claims will not be honored.

Let me quote this very meaningful scripture from section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

*And verily I say unto you, that the conditions of this law are these: All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections,*

*associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity, and that too most holy, by revelation and commandment through the medium of mine anointed, whom I have appointed on the earth to hold this power (and I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred), are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead.*

*Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion.*

*Will I accept of an offering, saith the Lord, that is not made in my name?*

*Or will I receive at your hands that which I have not appointed?*

*And will I appoint unto you, saith the Lord, except it be by law, even as I and my Father ordained unto you, before the world was?*

*I am the Lord thy God; and I give unto you this commandment—that no man shall come unto the Father but by me or by my word, which is my law, saith the Lord.*

*And everything that is in the world, whether it be ordained of men, by thrones, or principalities, or powers, or things of name, whatsoever they may be, that are not by me or by my word, saith the Lord, shall be thrown down, and shall not remain after men are dead, neither in nor after the resurrection, saith the Lord your God.*

*For whatsoever things remain are by me; and whatsoever things are not by me shall be shaken and destroyed. [D&C 132:7–14; italics added]*

That scripture is very clear. He will not receive at our hands that which He has not appointed. And things that are “ordained of men . . . shall not remain . . . in nor after the resurrection.”

Now, I counsel you to take inventory of your spiritual progress. Is your life in order?

Have you received the ordinances of the gospel that you should possess by this time in your life? Are they valid? If they come under the influence of the sealing power and authority, they will remain intact eternally; and your life, to this point, is in proper order.

I want to explain something to you. Sometimes I think this is understood by relatively few in the Church. But *you* should understand it. Again I make a comparison.

It is common in the world for institutions to delegate authority and at once to strictly limit the extent of what is delegated. For instance, in a branch bank the manager may have authorization to make loans up to a certain amount. If someone requests a loan larger than that amount, then a supervisor must approve it. For even larger amounts, the regulations of the bank may require that the president and chief executive officer himself must approve the loan. If a commitment for a loan is made by a branch manager, if it is within the policy, the bank will honor it, even though that manager may later quit and go to work for a competing bank.

Recently I attended a meeting of the board of directors of a corporation. The board decided to give a certain employee authority to commit the company on some important matters. So, a motion was passed. One director then observed that a motion was not enough. It should have been a resolution, a formal one, duly entered in the minutes. And so the motion was replaced by a resolution, because delegating authority is serious business, indeed.

The practices of delegating authority, and at once limiting it, is so commonly demonstrated in business and education, in government, in cultural organizations, that we should not have difficulty in understanding that principle in the Church. A missionary is given authority to teach and to baptize. With certain approval he can ordain. If he is an elder, however, he could not ordain someone to be a seventy or a high priest, for his authority is limited. A bishop can

call and release within the limits of his jurisdiction. But he could not, for instance, set apart a stake high councilor. A stake president can set apart a stake high councilor, but he cannot ordain a patriarch.

Those who hold the Aaronic Priesthood, or the preparatory priesthood, have authority to perform the ordinances that belong to that priesthood. They can baptize, bless the sacrament, and perform those services relating to the lesser priesthood. They cannot, however, confirm someone a member of the Church, for that takes a higher authority.

Those who have the Melchizedek Priesthood can perform the ordinances relating to the higher priesthood. But unless they are given special authorization, they cannot endow, nor seal, nor perform the ordinances that pertain to the temple, for there are limits.

I have heard President Kimball say (and it is something that other presidents of the Church have said) that while he holds all of the keys that are upon the earth, there are keys that he does not hold. There are keys that have not been given to him as president of the Church because they are reserved for higher power and authority.

For example, he said that he does not hold the keys of the resurrection. The Lord has them, but He does not delegate them—neither anciently, nor to modern prophets. He mentioned, also, the authority to command the elements and to walk on the water. The Lord has these keys, but He has not given them to us.

Nevertheless, in the Church we hold sufficient authority to perform all of the ordinances necessary to redeem and to exalt the whole human family. And because we have the keys to the sealing power, what we bind in proper order here will be bound in heaven. Those keys—the keys to seal and bind on earth and have it bound in heaven—represent the consummate gift from our God. With that authority we can baptize and bless and endow and seal, and the Lord will honor the commitments.

I have thought a dozen times while preparing for tonight how much I wish there could be time to trace the history of how we got the sealing power. For in that account we would find how much the Lord regards it. We would begin to see into eternities. But that must wait for another day. I will only set the door ajar, hoping that you, on your own, will seek to open it completely. I will mention just this one thread through history.

Nearly nine hundred years before Christ, a prophet appeared in the court of the king of Israel. He is introduced only as “Elijah the Tishbite of the inhabitants of Gilead.” (We don’t know what “Tishbite” means; we know that “Gilead” was a wilderness.) He carried with him a sacred authority. He denounced King Ahab, and then he closed the heavens over that wicked land and said there should be no rain. He set no conditions such as “It won’t rain until you repent”; he simply said there should be no rain except “according to my word.” In plain language, “It’s not going to rain until I say so.”

Elijah worked out his ministry, ordained and anointed Elisha to succeed him, and then—and this is important—he did not die. Like Moses before him, he was translated.

After that, his name appears only once in the Old Testament, in the next to the last verse of the last chapter of the Old Testament. It is here that Malachi prophesies that Elijah would return and that he would “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers,” lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse.

I would encourage you to read in First and Second Kings and in Chronicles the account of Elijah because there is something special about him.

The Jews, the Mohammedans, and later the Christians, all maintain traditions that Elijah will return.

When John the Baptist strode onto the pages of history, he was asked, “Are you Elijah?”

When Peter, James, and John went with the Lord to the Mount of Transfiguration, there appeared with the transfigured Lord two personages. They recognize them to be Moses and Elijah, who had come to convey to that presidency the sealing power.

In 34 A.D., after His crucifixion, the Lord ministered to the Nephites. He dictated to them—and this is remarkable in scriptural history—the last two chapters of Malachi (which contained the prophecy that Elijah would return), caused them to write them, and then expounded them.

When the Angel Moroni appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith to tell him of the plates, the first scripture he quoted was Malachi’s prophecy that Elijah would return. The prophet installed that quotation as section one of the Doctrine and Covenants. It is now section two, since the preface was given by revelation and now precedes it.

Thirteen years after Moroni appeared, a temple had been built adequate for the purpose, and the Lord again appeared and Elijah came with Him and bestowed the keys of the sealing power. Thereafter ordinances were not tentative, but permanent. The sealing power was with us. *No* authorization transcends it in value. That power gives substance and eternal permanence to all ordinances performed with proper authority for both the living and the dead.

We used the analogy of an insurance policy. It would not be wise to buy insurance if all of the claims had to be paid by the agent who sold you the policy, out of his pocket. You would not be very secure if your protection depended upon the financial resources of the salesman instead of the company. You should know what the policy requires the *company* to do and what it requires *you* to do. For instance, how do you cancel a policy if you decide not to

continue? Remember too, policies can be cancelled by the company as well. They cannot be obliged to keep their part of the contract, if you willfully disregard yours.

When you receive an ordinance, whether it be baptism, the sacrament, an ordination or setting apart, an endowment or a sealing, you receive an obligation. Thereafter, you are under covenant not to steal, nor to lie, nor to profane, nor take the name of the Lord in vain. You are obligated to maintain the moral standard. This standard—by commandment of the Lord—requires that the only authorized use of the sacred power of procreation is with one to whom we are legally and lawfully wed. You have responsibility to support every principle of the gospel and the servants the Lord has ordained to administer them.

President Joseph Fielding Smith said this: “Each ordinance and requirement given to man for the purpose of bringing to pass his salvation and exaltation is a covenant” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56], 1:152).

Be careful, our youth, not to take the ordinances and covenants of the gospel lightly, nor to maintain them carelessly. It will take increased courage to keep your covenants. The world has moved away from those high standards.

It seems that there comes, each generation or so, a time when the faithful of the Church are under great criticism, even under attack. That has always been true of those who are under covenant to the Lord. We must expect, as part of our way of life, to stand, on occasion, condemned by those outside the Church who oppose the standards the Lord has directed us to keep.

Occasionally one inside the Church joins the ranks of the critics. Beware of covenant breakers. It is one thing for nonmembers to criticize and attack the Church and the leaders. It is quite another when someone within the Church does so, after they have entered into

solemn and sacred covenants to do otherwise. It makes a very big difference indeed.

Some years ago I attended a meeting at Ricks College with a group of seminary teachers. President Joseph Fielding Smith, then the President of the Council of the Twelve, met with us. One of the teachers asked about a letter being circulated throughout the Church at that time from a dissident member who claimed that many of the ordinances were not valid because of some supposed mistake in the procedure in conferring the priesthood. When President Smith was asked what he thought about the man's claim he said, "Before we consider the claim, let me tell you about that man." He then told us of several things about him and about the covenants he had not kept. He concluded with this statement: "And so you see, that man is a liar, pure and simple—well, perhaps not so pure."

There are those outside the Church—and in—who will try to persuade us or compel us to change our direction. The keeping of covenants is a measure of those outside of the Church as well.

An individual seeking to hold high public office, perhaps in business or in government, may claim to be worthy of trust and insist he would not cheat, not represent, nor mislead the public. Ask yourself, what does that individual do with a private trust? A good measure is to determine how he keeps covenants relating to his family. While one could not excuse, one perhaps could understand that it would be somewhat easier to steal from, cheat on, or lie to an anonymous stranger, or to the public, than it would be to one's own family. Those who are not faithful to their marriage partners and to their families are hardly worthy of confidence and trust in education, in business, in government. If they would cheat on marriage vows, counting perhaps on forgiveness and tolerance that may have been extended at times, surely they must stand unworthy of any great public trust.

Beware of covenant breakers, inside the Church and out. Beware of those who mock the prophets.

In Civil War days a performer named Blondin astonished the country by crossing the Niagara River on a tightrope. On one occasion President Abraham Lincoln faced a delegation of critics and said:

*Gentlemen, suppose all the property you possessed were in gold, and you had placed it in the hands of a Blondin to carry across the Niagara River on a rope. With slow, cautious steps he walks the rope, bearing your all. Would you shake the cable and keep shouting at him, "Blondin stand up a little straighter; Blondin, stoop a little more; go a little faster; lean more to the South; now lean a little more to the North?" Would that be your behavior in such an emergency? No, you would hold your breath, every one of you, as well as your tongues. You would keep your hands off until he was safe on the other side.*

*This government, gentlemen, is carrying an immense weight. Untold treasures are in its hands. The persons managing the ship of state in this storm are doing the best they can. Don't worry them with needless warnings and complaints. Keep silence; be patient, and we will get you safe across.* [John Wesley Hill, *Abraham Lincoln: Man of God* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons), p. 402]

Keep your spiritual premiums paid up. Do not let your spiritual policy lapse. Do not cause it to be cancelled in some moment of rebellion. Extend your policy by adding endorsements as you receive the higher ordinances. Work to qualify for each of them.

I was always impressed when President Joseph Fielding Smith was asked to pray. Invariably, he would make reference to the principles and ordinances of the gospel and would always include this expression: "May we remain faithful to our covenants and obligations."

And that is my message, simply this: Be faithful to the covenants and ordinances of the gospel. Qualify for those sacred ordinances step by step. Honor the covenants connected with them, and you will be happy. Then your lives will be in order.

Now, coming back—*order, ordain, ordinance*: To put in rows; to set in proper sequence; to put in proper relationship. And then each of you—with your father and his father and so on through the generations—will be in order and in proper rows, and your children, likewise.

This is a great time to live. When times are unsettled, when the dangers persist, the Lord pours out his blessings upon His Church and kingdom. Look forward, young people, with an attitude of faith and hope. Look forward to being married and then, in due time, to giving in marriage.

I have been associated now in the councils of the Church for nearly twenty years. During that time I have seen, from the sidelines at least, many a crisis. I have seen, at times, great disappointment, some concern, maybe at times some anxiety. One thing I have never seen is fear. Fear is the antithesis of faith. In this Church and in this kingdom, there is faith.

God bless you, our youth. Learn to understand the meaning of the ordinances. Do not accept them or maintain them carelessly.

I bear witness that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father. He has delegated to His prophet upon this earth that sealing power that will see us all in order and all happy. Of this I bear witness in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.