

## The Ordinances and Sacraments

**T**HE RELIGIOUS WORLD has used the terms of *ordinance* and *sacrament* interchangeably. This has led to considerable confusion on the part of many, so that "the sacrament" has come to mean to some the rite in which the Lord's Supper is celebrated, to the exclusion of any other rite. Others have used the word "ordinance" as if it were only a rite.

The student of the Scriptures soon comes to the realization that these terms are not truly interchangeable. It becomes important to them, therefore, that these be understood, if true worship is to be experienced in the rites and ceremonies of the church.

### ORDINANCE DEFINED

An ordinance of God is any decree or commandment of God which has to do with ordering the universe for the good of man. Thus, as the church administers the ordinances through the priesthood it carries into action the decrees or commandments of God for the purpose of establishing God's righteousness among men. This may take the form of preaching, rites, or other ministry.

Ordinances are important. The Lord said, "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; and without this, no man can see the face of God, even the Father, and live."<sup>1</sup>

Webster defines an ordinance as that which is decreed or regulated by one having authority, as by God--a prescribed practice or usage. The Scriptures show a fourfold aspect to ordinances:

1. An ordinance may be God's fixed purpose and appointment which affects the state of action and interaction of his whole creation. The Psalmist said, "For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations; thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. They continue this day according to thine ordinances."<sup>2</sup>

Jeremiah, speaking of the same aspect, said, "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night."<sup>3</sup>

In each of these an ordinance of God appears to be that which has set the laws of interaction in the universe. It is of these ordinances that we read, "He hath given a law unto all things by which they move in their times, and their seasons; and their courses are fixed; even the courses of the heavens, and the earth; which comprehend the earth and all the planets; and they give light to each other in their times, and in their seasons, in their minutes, in their hours, in their days, in their weeks, in their months, in their years: all these are one year with God, but not with man.

"The earth rolls upon her wings; and the sun giveth his light by day, and the moon giveth her light by night; and the stars also giveth their light, as they roll upon their wings, in their glory, in the midst of the power of God."<sup>4</sup>

2. We detect that ordinances have to do with God's commandments in general when we read, "Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein; I am the Lord your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments."<sup>5</sup>

Obedience is spoken of in latter-day revelation: "Wherefore he that prayeth whose spirit is contrite, the same is accepted of me, if he obey mine ordinances."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, through these we can note that God's decrees are ordinances in a broader sense than those found in rites and ceremonies.

3. God's appointing power is referred to as being an ordinance. "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power in the church but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God."<sup>7</sup>

4. It is in the realm of worship that most persons think of ordinances. The writer of Hebrews, speaking of certain rites, called some rites "carnal ordinances" which were imposed on the Israelites "until the time of reformation."<sup>8</sup> Paul, in turn, writing to the church at Corinth, wrote, "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances as I delivered them to you."<sup>9</sup> In this latter case, he may have been referring to rites or he might have had God's commandments in general on his mind.

If we study the languages in which the Old Testament and the New Testament were written, we see some of this fine distinction there. The "mother tongue" of the Old Testament is Hebrew, while, for all useful purposes, the "mother tongue" of the New Testament is Greek. Note in the following chart the words which have been translated as *ordinance*.

Greek word	Hebrew word	Scripture ref.	Literal meaning	English trans.
	Choq	Jeremiah 31:36	Statute, decree	Ordinance
	Chuqqah	Ezekial 43:18	Statute, decree	Ordinance
	Yad	Ezra 3:10	Hand	Ordinance
	Mitsvah	Nehemiah 10:32	Command, charge, precept	Ordinance
	Mishmereth	Malachi 3:14	Watch, ward, guard	Ordinance
	Mishpat	Psalms 119:91	Judgement	Ordinance
Diatage		Romans 13:2	Thorough arrangement	Ordinance
Dogma		Colossians 2:14	Dogma, decree, determination	Ordinances
Ktisis		1 Peter 2:13	Anything made	Ordinance
Paradosis		1 Cor. 11:2	A giving over	Ordinances

It seems significant that in every case the translators who have brought these different words into English have considered that the thought of the Scripture writer was concerned with something decreed or regulated by God. As we study the Scriptures further we note that each of the thoughts had to do with what was for the righteousness or good of man.<sup>10</sup>

Joseph Smith defined four of the six principles of the gospel found in Hebrews 6:1, 2 as ordinances: "We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel. We believe that these ordinances are, 1st, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; 2nd, Repentance; 3rd, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; 4th, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost."<sup>11</sup>

The word used in Hebrews 5:12 to indicate these principles is *oracles* (λογιον). This is the diminutive form of the word *logos*, having to do with the gospel preached by the Son.<sup>12</sup> Since the gospel preached by Jesus Christ is so that we may have life and have it more abundantly, it seems to bear out the concept implied by the translators.

## **ORDINANCES VERSUS COMMANDMENTS**

The expression "commandments" appears whenever we discuss ordinance. Ordinances, however, do not come to man by way of an imposed demand from God as much as his forming basic principles of life which must be obeyed if man is to have the "abundant life."

In Ephesians 2:13-15 we find, "But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ, For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances."

The "law of commandments" refers to the Mosaic law which was given to the Israelites at the time of their apostasy in the desert lands. It is the "carnal" law which was replaced by the greater commandments of God as found in the ordinances. With the coming of Jesus Christ, the idea that man must be commanded to be righteous was overridden with the law of love -- man follows God because "he first loved us."

Throughout this study, therefore, we will use the word "ordinance" in its broadest sense when it stands alone. If we wish to indicate that there is a more limited application we will modify it with such modifiers as *sacramental* or *ceremonial*.

## **SACRAMENT DEFINED**

According to Webster, a sacrament is a certain religious act or ceremony or practice, sacred in character or significance. This act, or rite, involves a pledge or token or symbol to signify a spiritual bond between God and man.

To the church, a sacrament is a rite enjoined by Christ on his disciples, administered under his authority, and shared in his Spirit.

As a sacred rite it is the most disciplined form of worship in the church. The setting should be attractive. Distracting and added ceremonies which in themselves may tend to become symbolic should be avoided. The central act in it is symbolic. The symbols must be understood and interpreted. The rite

does not add to the word of God; it reiterates it and gives it effect in man's life. In itself, the symbolic act is meaningless. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ can explain it. In the light of the gospel it becomes distinct as a visible sign of what the Lord has promised. Through it there comes personal assurance that it is true and God stands by it. In this sense then, there is a covenant relationship involved in which God and man are brought together into a oneness.

There is a twofold aspect of effectiveness in administering a sacramental rite: (1) that which happens in the life of the individual receiving the rite, and (2) that which happens to the body of the church. At baptism something wonderful happens to the individual as his life is cleansed and he enlists in the cause of Christ. Something wonderful happens to the church, also, as he is accepted in the body of Christ and as each member participates in this initiatory rite. So, too, we find this twofold aspect in other sacraments: the Lord's Supper, marriage, etc.

A sacrament is more than a rite, It seems to have rooted in it a concept of sacrifice. The follower of Jesus Christ sees in it the symbol of living sacrifice. Through it he is drawn close to God by being identified with his sacrificial love. In a sense he dies with him and is resurrected with him. The old man dies and is resurrected through forgiveness. Without the shedding of blood or transferring to the symbol any mysterious properties, the recipient finds the word of God becomes flesh in him through a pledge or covenant. This pledge or covenant is given in a prescribed prayer or pledge.

The word "sacrament" does not appear in the Bible. In the Book of Mormon there is one reference to it. It appears thirteen times in Doctrine and Covenants. This seems to bear out the contention that the word is of rather recent usage in the church.

## SACRAMENTS AND SACRAMENTALISM

When we speak of sacraments in the church we are not speaking of sacramentalism. In its broad sense, sacramentalism is ascribing to any experience which brings a person to a worship of God, sacramental overtones. In this sense, a person may have a sacramental experience as he observes a beautiful sunset.

## THE ELEMENTS OF A SACRAMENT

There are certain elements which distinguish sacraments from other ordinances. These must be understood as we plan for their administration to the congregation. Lack of sensitivity to their meaning robs them of their full worship value and meaning.

- a. *The symbol.* There must be one or more symbols used in the sacrament. These symbols use some familiar object, usually something which has a familiar usage, through which a spiritual meaning can be expressed. This familiar usage and meaning must be understood by the officiant and the recipient. In baptism by water the symbols are (1) water with its cleansing power and its potential danger, (2) the minister (officiant) as the intermediary of God, (3) the congregation as the cloud of witnesses. Through burial in water, the cleansing from sin, the burial of the old man, and the resurrection of the new man are symbolized. Faith is exercised in that the recipient trusts his life in the hands of a man who is the one through whom God has chosen to perform the ordinance. The congregation witnesses the act, rejoicing as the angels in heaven rejoice, and mark the

"willingness to take . . . the name of Jesus Christ." There may be other symbolism which can be noted in the act, but these serve as illustration of the major factors.

- b. *The ordinance* (commandment). This may be a commandment enjoined for everyone, having to do with their salvation, such as is required in baptism. All mankind is commanded to be baptized. It may be a commandment for members of the church only, such as the Lord's Supper through which the dual aspect of communion is expressed: communion with God and communion with the Saints. On the other hand, it may be for an even more restricted purpose wherein marriage is sanctified.
- c. *The covenant*. A covenant is not a "bargain" struck with God. It is a solemn agreement between two parties, man and God. The agreement may be expressed in some sacraments through prescribed wording of the prayer or covenant. Through this the recipient comes into full agreement with the revealed promises of God. There is no coercion or imposition of will; it is made freely and worshipfully.
- d. *The sacrifice*. "Any sacramental experience has a note of sacrifice, the sense of an offering made to God."<sup>13</sup> This sacrifice is on a high spiritual level. The writer of Hebrews expressed a phase of it when he wrote, "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."<sup>14</sup> This may involve the giving up of some treasured vice, and ultimately presently our own bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord. Sometimes it is expressed through oblation.
- e. *The rite*. In the sacred ceremony some of the details may vary but other parts are fixed. A worship atmosphere is created through adequate preparation of the place of worship and the life of all who participate. The symbolisms are administered and received and all of the elements of the sacrament are welded into a whole.
- f. *The intermediary*. The intermediary between God and man is the priesthood. In every case there must be a member of the priesthood with divine authority to officiate, for the rite to be a true sacrament. In part, this is an act of faith for the recipient in that he recognizes that God uses men as his representatives in the church.
- g. *The recipient*. If there is to be a sacrament, there must be a person to receive it. This person must comprehend the total act in relation to its parts.

The sacraments are never personal and private. They necessarily involve divinity and, to a greater or lesser degree, they also involve the church of Jesus Christ."<sup>15</sup>

## PRAYER FORMS IN SACRAMENTS

This is a very high type of worship experience and the most disciplined in the church. There are no prescribed prayer forms in any other worship services of the church but there is a prescribed prayer form in some sacraments.

In baptism the word formula is a prayerful declaration: "Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen." Although there is no prescribed wording involved in the confirmation service wherein hands are laid upon the head for the reception of the Holy Ghost, this service is really a part of the whole baptism. Attesting to this is the fact that the recipient is not accorded membership privileges until both services are completed.

In the sacrament of the Lord's Supper the prayer of blessing on the bread is given:

"O God, the eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen."

A prayer of blessing is prescribed for the wine:

"O God, the eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son which was shed for them, that they may witness unto thee, O God, the eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen."

In solemnizing the marriage covenant, there is a formula given for the covenant and one for the benedictory prayer:

#### *The Covenant*

"You both mutually agree to be each other's companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition; that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives?"

#### *The Benediction*

"May God add his blessings and keep you to fulfill your covenants from henceforth and for ever. Amen."

## **THE PURPOSE OF THE SACRAMENTS**

All ordinances convey divine blessing through the principle of obedience. This then is true of the sacraments. Each sacrament offers some particular blessing which differs from that found in others. "They change the man's status in relation to God and some of them in relation to men. They secure to the recipient . . . certain rights and privileges in this life and in the eternal world which otherwise he could not gain. . . . They are as the divine handclasp lifting man up to God."<sup>16</sup>

Outwardly these sacraments are symbols, but within them there is a power of divinity. This power carries spiritual blessings to the souls of men, fulfilling to them the purposes of God relative to their recovery from sin and their ultimate salvation in the kingdom of God. They are enjoined to meet the needs of man. The results are effected by the workings of the Holy Spirit within the soul. This is God's design. Men are brought within direct contact with God by his Spirit and by this same spirit the righteousness of God is revealed to men so they are made partakers of the divine nature.<sup>17</sup> Thus, there is conveyed a

newness of life to man.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FORM

"The ordinances and sacraments of the church are designed to convey new life to mankind. Any change in their form mutilates their value. Any deviation from the spirit in which it is designed that they should be approached constitutes a straying from the ordinances, which straying is the beginning of apostasy. In the sacramental rites of the church the spiritual and the material are intimately woven together so that one could say that the spirit and the body, or the spirit and the form are the soul of the experience. It is important to note that the sacraments of the church convey more than ideas or good feelings. They are designed to convey God himself to the worshiper so that in very truth 'He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath life in himself.' There is in the universe a spiritual substance which is mediated through these physical forms in the church, and without partaking of this 'word,' this spiritual man, Christ Jesus, there is no divine life in the fullest sense of the term. 'Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood, ye have no life in you.'"<sup>18</sup>

The teachings of the Scripture and the experience of the church combined to indicate that our need for covenant blessings is met most frequently in the sacraments which are ordained of God, administered by his authority, and shared by his invitation. In these sacramental experiences our needs are brought into focus in specific acts to which our spiritual energies can be directed, for which we can make special preparation and in which we can come into divine presence for a specific blessing.

There is another factor to be considered. Although the sacraments of the church are established by God, there is no *ex opere operato* that is, no power within the acts themselves. If this were true, we could combine certain form in words and acts and expect them always to bring the full effect of the blessings promised—something like putting a certain number of potatoes, carrots, celery, and seasoning in water, bringing to a boil, and having soup. We believe that the form is important in order to preserve the proper symbolism but also that there are spiritual conditions necessary within the persons participating if it is to be effective. The prayer which we offer at the Lord's Supper requests the blessing of the emblems in order that "they may do it in remembrance." This is made clear in the Book of Mormon, "If you do always remember me you shall always have my spirit to be with you."<sup>19</sup> The church may be enriched through the sacraments because they are based upon the nature of God. The form is determined by him. Carelessness, heart-wandering, and superstition can change the form and withdraw us from the promises and guarantees of spiritual renewal. "The form without the spirit is dead. The spirit without the form can find no means of expression."<sup>20</sup>

## THE WORSHIP EXPERIENCE

Every worship service of the church should be a wonderful spiritual experience for the Saints. If the service is "performed," if it is hurried or thoughtlessly prepared the congregation is deprived of that which should be theirs. Preparation should be made on the part of those who officiate, from the deacon to the elder. Preparation should be made, also, by every member of the congregation.

This is especially true with reference to all of the ceremonial ordinances. A baptism "squeezed in" between the church school hour and the morning worship, or the blessing of an infant "worked in" to a worship service because the parents happen to be able to come takes away from it some of the elements

of worship inherent within it.

Every ceremonial ordinance should be planned as an integral part of the worship experience. The music, words spoken, prayers, introits, invocations, benedictions, Scriptures, and all other elements of the worship' experience should be wedded in harmony. In this manner the ceremonial ordinances will be most meaningful.

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1. D and C 83:3
  2. Psalms 119:89-91
  3. Jeremiah 31:35
  4. D and C 85:11, 12
  5. Lev. 18:4
  6. D and C 52:4c
  7. Romans 13:1, 2
  8. Hebrews 9:10
  9. I Cor. 11:2
  10. Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible
  11. *Church History*, Vol. 2, page 570
  12. John 1:1
  13. Edwards, F. H., *Authority and Spiritual Power*, Herald House, p. 45
  14. Hebrews 13:15
  15. Edwards, F. H., *Authority and Spiritual Power*, p. 45
  16. Fry, Charles, *Nature of Priesthood*, Herald House, p. 60
  17. II Peter 1:4
  18. Oakman and Weddle, *O Worship the King*, Herald House, pp. 51, 52
  19. III Nephi 8:36
  20. *O Worship the King*, pp. 62, 63