

How Are We Physically and Spiritually Reborn in the Temple? The Process of Sanctification

The New and Everlasting Covenant

The blessings of the Atonement are made available to mankind through what the Lord calls “The New and Everlasting Covenant.”¹ This comprehensive covenant includes the baptismal covenant, the covenant made during the sacrament, temple covenants, and covenants made at “other times.”²



Figure 1. The New and Everlasting Covenant

What is meant by covenants that are made at “other times”? President Brigham Young answered this question when he said that there are additional ordinances that will be given to the faithful in the next life:³

We will operate here, in all the ordinances of the house of God which pertain to this side the veil, and those who pass beyond and secure to themselves a resurrection pertaining to the lives will go on and receive more and more, and will receive one after another until they are crowned Gods, even the sons of God.



Figure 2. Crooked Baby Magnolia Tree with a Splint⁴

By means of the New and Everlasting Covenant, our Father in Heaven helps His children increase in spiritual stature.⁵ Although at baptism we execute our first gospel covenant in mortality by “relying wholly upon the merits”⁶ of Christ, the Lord intends that we gradually gain spiritual strength through making and keeping additional covenants until, someday, we come to the point where “we shall be like him.”⁷ As Chauncey Riddle has written:⁸

... [Human] beings may be saved only by binding themselves to Christ. It is as if our task were to stand straight and tall before Father, but because of the Fall, we are broken and twisted. The Savior is our straight and tall splint. If we bind ourselves to Him, wrap strong covenants around us and Him that progressively draw us up into His form and nature, then we can become righteous as He is and can be saved. But without Him we are nothing.... The New and Everlasting Covenant is our detour whereby our Savior strengthens us until we can tread the narrow way of justice and mercy on our own.



Figure 3. Justification through Baptism, the Gate to Eternal Life

The Two Parts of the Covenant: Justification and Sanctification

There are two parts to the New and Everlasting Covenant:⁹ *justification* and *sanctification*. Elder Bruce C. Hafen explains:¹⁰

We may become “just” or justified (as when a printer lines up the edges of crooked margins; when all the lines are straight, the printing is “justified”) when we demonstrate sufficient repentance to receive the Savior’s mercy. The demands of justice are then satisfied. This may be the “justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” which “is just and true.”¹¹ Then, as a second stage, we may be “made perfect” or sanctified (in addition to receiving forgiveness of our sins) as a further manifestation of the Savior’s mercy: “And we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength.”¹² Sanctification is thus the process by which we become holy following baptism.

Nephi describes the first part, justification, as follows:¹³

For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water...

Baptism, however, is just the beginning—as Nephi says, it is the gate. After baptism “cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost”¹⁴—the beginning of the process of sanctification that continues in the temple. President Thomas S. Monson taught:¹⁵

Until you have entered the House of the Lord and have received all the blessings which await you there, you have not obtained everything the Church has to offer.

President Spencer W. Kimball put it this way:¹⁶

Any church that you know of may possibly be able to take you for a long ride, and bring you some degree of peace and happiness and blessing, and they can carry you to the veil and there they drop you. The Church of Jesus Christ picks you up on this side of the veil... and you live its commandments, carries you right through the veil... and on through the eternities to exaltation.

The part of the Gospel that carries us “right through the veil” might be called the path of exaltation. Following his explanation of baptism, Nephi summarized this process of sanctification, the second part of the New and Everlasting Covenant:¹⁷

And now... after yet have gotten into this strait and narrow path [through baptism], I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay...

Wherefore, ye must press forward... and if ye press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.

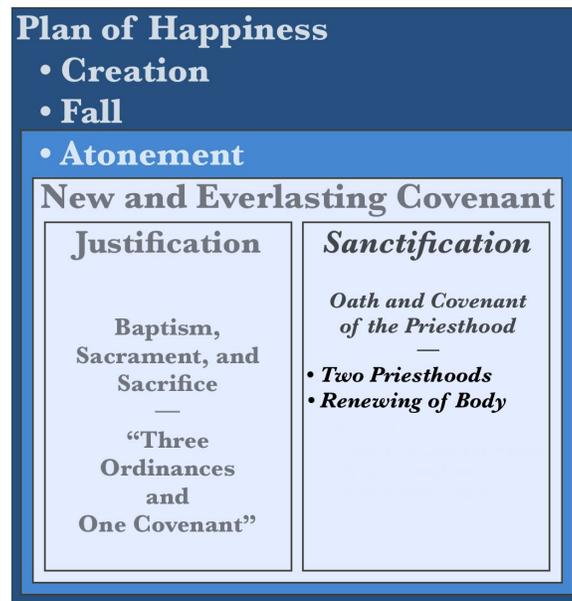


Figure 4. “Sanctified... Unto the Renewing of Their Bodies”

A scriptural passage called “The Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood” begins in D&C 84:33. It describes the process of sanctification, the second part of the New and Everlasting Covenant, and details the specific responsibilities and blessings associated with the priesthood:

For whoso is faithful unto the obtaining these two priesthoods of which I have spoken, and the magnifying their calling, are sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies.

The “two priesthoods” are, of course, the Aaronic and Melchizedek. Worthy women may, of course, receive the blessings of the second part of the New and Everlasting Covenant without priesthood ordination.¹⁸ The “calling” mentioned in v. 33 does not refer to the kinds of temporary church assignments to which one is set apart, but rather to the permanent responsibilities of those who have been given the blessings of the priesthood.¹⁹ The duties of this priesthood calling include strengthening the faith of the membership of the Church, the gathering of Israel through missionary work, caring for those in need, and participating in temple ordinances.²⁰ To “magnify” a calling means to faithfully perform the duties pertaining to it “with all diligence” and “by laboring with our might.”²¹



Figure 5. Patrick Devonas, 1965-: *Allegory of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (detail)²²

Physical and Spiritual Rebirth

To be “sanctified” is to be made holy—to become a Latter-day *Saint* in the full sense of the word. Since celestial personages are beings of both “spirit and element, inseparably connected,”²³ the promise of sanctification necessarily encompasses a renewal of the physical body.

Anciently, this renewal was both symbolized and actualized when Aaron was “wash[ed],” “anoint[ed],” and clothed in “holy garments... so that he [might] minister unto [the Lord] in the priest’s office,”²⁴ thus recapitulating his foreordination to this calling.²⁵ In premortal life, faithful women were also given assignments to be carried out later on earth.²⁶

Speaking of Christ as the prototype for all those who receive these ordinances, the *Gospel of Philip* expresses the same concept: “He who...[was begotten] before everything was begotten anew. He [who was] once [anointed] was anointed anew. He who was redeemed in turn redeemed (others).”²⁷

Truman G. Madsen has described the way in which these blessings are received in our day within the temple:²⁸

It is as if, if I may mix the figure, we are given in the house of God a patriarchal blessing to every organ and attribute and power of our being, a blessing that is to be fulfilled in this world and the next, keys and insights that can enable us to live a godly life in a very worldly world, protected—yes, even insulated—from the poisons and distortions that are everywhere.

The ultimate renewal of the body is, of course, the change that will take place for those found worthy to enter the celestial kingdom at the time of their resurrection.²⁹ However, there are also blessings of physical renewal that can be claimed in the here and now.³⁰ For example, D&C 84:80 elaborates on this promise of renewal:

And any man that shall go and preach this gospel of the kingdom, and fail not to continue faithful in all things, shall not be weary in mind, neither darkened, neither in body, limb, nor joint; and a hair of his head shall not fall to the ground unnoticed. And they shall not go hungry, neither athirst.

D&C 88:29 teaches us that it is only those who are “quickened by a portion of the celestial glory” before the resurrection who shall be blessed with a fulness of that glory in the life to come. Baptism, “the gate by which [we] enter” the “strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life,”³¹ is a requirement only for those who will inherit celestial glory.³² So it is evident that those who have been baptized and then have continued down that path by receiving and keeping additional covenants and ordinances have already been “quickened by a portion of the celestial glory.”³³

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that being “born again comes by the Spirit of God through ordinances.”³⁴ Through the ordinances we are repeatedly “reborn” as we experience the

symbolism of death and resurrection through baptism of water,³⁵ as we begin a new life following the cleansing “baptism of the Holy Ghost,”³⁶ as we are spiritually and physically renewed in the initiatory ordinances, and as the stages of the drama of our existence are presented in the endowment. The endowment enacts our individual progress through multiple “rebirths”—from the spirit world to mortal life, and from thence to becoming sons and daughters of Christ—and ultimately of the Father Himself, receiving all the blessings of the Firstborn.³⁷ The book of Moses summarizes this process:³⁸

... ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory.

Note the distinction between the “words of eternal life”—meaning the sure promise of exaltation that can only be received in an anticipatory way “in this world”—and “eternal life” itself, which will be given “in the world to come.”

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Endnotes

¹ The origins of this covenant were prior to creation itself. According to Joseph Smith (J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 16 May 1841, p. 190):

Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organization of this earth, and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth; these personages, according to Abraham's record, are called God the first, the Creator, God the second, the Redeemer, and God the third, the witness or Testator.

² The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Gospel Principles 2009*, p. 85. The designation of this covenant as "new" is typically explained in terms of it having been revealed "anew" in each dispensation. Alternatively, Riddle proposes that it "is new because it is the second covenant" of mercy (see Alma 12:32, 27; Moses 6:56), given after Adam and Eve transgressed and broke the first covenant of justice (C. C. Riddle, *New*, pp. 226-229). He further explains (*ibid.*, p. 242):

Our Savior kept the first covenant and was exalted by it. Had he sinned, there could have been no one to atone for Him with Father. Because of His faithfulness in the first covenant, the second, or new and everlasting, covenant was made possible, that all of us may share His blessings with Him for all eternity (D&C 88:107).

³ B. Young, 24 August 1872, p. 13.

⁴ Photograph in the public domain. From *Crooked Baby Trees—How to Fix, Crooked Baby Trees*.

⁵ See J. M. Bradshaw, *Standing*.

⁶ 2 Nephi 31:19. Certainly there is truth in Stephen Robinson's emphasis on the difference in magnitude between the "61 cents" we contribute toward our salvation and the unfathomably costly contribution that Jesus Christ made on our behalf (S. E. Robinson, *Believing*, pp. 31-34). However, there are major differences between Latter-day Saint beliefs and extreme versions of "grace-oriented" theologies—as exemplified by Charles Spurgeon's famous line: "If there be but one stitch in the celestial garment of our righteousness which we ourselves are to put in, we are lost" (cited in B. B. Warfield, *Plan*, p. 51).

Although at baptism we are completely dependent on Christ, He intends that we gain spiritual strength through the process of sanctification until we become as He is—"we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2; Moroni 7:48). Just as Jesus Christ will put all enemies beneath his feet (1 Corinthians 15:25-26), so Joseph Smith taught that each person who would be saved must also, with His essential help, gain the power needed to "triumph over all [their] enemies and put them under [their] feet" (J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 14 May 1843, p. 297. See also 17 May 1843, p. 301; 21 May 1843, p. 305), possessing the "glory, authority, majesty, power and dominion which Jehovah possesses" (L. E. Dahl *et al.*, *Lectures*, 7:9, p. 98; cf. 7:16—note that the authorship of these lectures, traditionally ascribed to Joseph Smith, is not certain).

As Riddle explains (C. C. Riddle, *New*, p. 228), "the covenant of baptism is [not only] our pledge to seek after good and to eliminate all choosing and doing of evil in our lives, [but] also our receiving the power to keep that promise," i.e., through the gift of the Holy Ghost. For us, Jesus Christ is not only our Redeemer, but also the literal prototype of the process of probation that each of us is to pass through if we are to become gods ourselves.

⁷ 1 John 3:2; Moroni 7:48.

⁸ C. C. Riddle, *New*, pp. 241-242.

⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 228.

¹⁰ B. C. Hafen, *Broken*, p. 166. Cf. D. A. Bednar, *Clean Hands*. Smith and Sjodahl further explain (H. M. Smith *et al.*, *Commentary*, p. 104. Cf. Helaman 3:35; D. T. Christofferson, *Justification*):

Justification is a judicial act, whereby God declares that the sinner who repents and by faith accepts the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and who is baptized according to the Word of God,

is acquitted and received into His Kingdom... Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit by which he who is justified is enabled to keep the Commandments of God and grow in holiness.

See N. T. Wright, *Justification* for a non-LDS view of justification that avoids the extremes of “grace-alone” interpretations of Paul’s writings on the subject.

¹¹ D&C 20:30.

¹² D&C 20:31.

¹³ 2 Nephi 31:17.

¹⁴ 2 Nephi 31:17.

¹⁵ T. S. Monson, *Holy Temple*, p. 93, cited in T. S. Monson, *Teachings*, p. 306. Cf. G. B. Hinckley, *Teachings 1997*, p. 641.

¹⁶ S. W. Kimball, *Teachings 1982*, p. 50.

¹⁷ 2 Nephi 31:19-20. For a detailed comparison between 2 Nephi 31-32 and ancient temple concepts, see J. T. Parker, *Doctrine of Christ*.

¹⁸ J. E. Talmage, *House of the Lord (1912)*, p. 94. To say that women do not require priesthood ordination to receive these blessings is not to say that God does not intend to give them authority in the Kingdom of God. Joseph Fielding Smith, then an apostle, wrote (J. F. Smith, Jr., *Doctrines*, 3:178):

There is nothing in the teachings of the Gospel which declares that men are superior to women. The Lord has given unto men the power of the priesthood and sent them forth to labor in his service. A woman’s calling is in a different direction. The most noble, exalting calling of all is that which has been given to women as the mothers of men. Women do not hold the priesthood, but if they are faithful and true, they will become priestesses and queens in the Kingdom of God, and that implies that they will be given authority.

Elder James E. Talmage wrote (J. E. Talmage, *Eternity of Sex*):

In the restored Church of Jesus Christ, the Holy Priesthood is conferred, as an individual bestowal, upon men only, and this in accordance with Divine requirement. It is not given to woman to exercise the authority of the Priesthood independently; nevertheless, in the sacred endowments associated with the ordinances pertaining to the House of the Lord, woman shares with man the blessings of the priesthood. When the frailties and imperfections of mortality are left behind, in the glorified state of the blessed hereafter, husband and wife will administer in their respective stations, seeing and understanding alike, and cooperating to the full in the government of their family kingdom. Then shall woman be recompensed in rich measure for all the injustice that womanhood has endured in mortality. Then shall woman reign by Divine right, a queen in the resplendent realm of her glorified state, even as exalted man shall stand, priest and king unto the Most High God. Mortal eye cannot see nor mind comprehend the beauty, glory, and majesty of a righteous woman made perfect in the celestial kingdom of God.

¹⁹ President Joseph F. Smith said (J. F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, p. 148):

There is no office growing out of this priesthood that is or can be greater than the priesthood itself. It is from the priesthood that the office derives its authority and power. No office gives authority to the priesthood. No office adds power to the priesthood. But all offices in the Church derive their power, their virtue, their authority, *from* the priesthood.

Writes President Joseph Fielding Smith (J. F. Smith, Jr., *Oath*, p. 91. Copyright Intellectual Reserve, Inc. Used by permission):

It does not matter what office we hold as long as we are true and faithful to our obligations. One office is not greater than another, although for administrative reasons one priesthood holder may be called to preside over and direct the labors of another.

²⁰ “Church Mission Statement” in First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Leadership Training Emphasis, 10 December 2009.

²¹ Jacob 1:5. Cf. Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual: Religion 324-325, Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual, p. 183.

²² With permission of Patrick Devonas. See <http://catholickungfu.wordpress.com/2011/04/23/allegory-of-the-resurrection-of-jesus-christ/> (accessed February 4, 2012).

²³ D&C 93:33.

²⁴ Exodus 40:12-13. See J. M. Bradshaw, *God's Image*, pp. 661-662.

²⁵ A poem by W. W. Phelps asserts that “[b]efore this world was known,” certain spirits “were wash’d and set apart for the glory yet to be.” He says that they were also given a “white stone” with a “new name,” and that they were to receive these things again when they returned to their heavenly home (*Deseret News*, 6, 416, cited in *ibid.*, pp. 299-300 n. 4-9). See also J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, 12 May 1844, p. 371; J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 12 May 1844, p. 365; Alma 13:1-8; cf. Moses 1:6; Abraham 3:23.

²⁶ S. W. Kimball, *Righteous Women*, p. 102. See Emma Smith’s blessing request, where she asked that she might live to “perform all the work that [she] covenanted to perform in the spirit-world” (G. N. Jones, *Emma*, p. 295).

²⁷ W. W. Isenberg, Philip, 70:36-71:3, p. 152.

²⁸ T. G. Madsen, House, pp. 280-281.

²⁹ D&C 88:29. See, e.g., the account of Lorenzo Snow, June 1846, cited in M. U. Beecher, Iowa, pp. 268-269.

³⁰ See, e.g., H. B. Brown, Participation, p. 507; H. B. Eyring, Jr., Oath, p. 62; T. G. Madsen, Man Illumined, p. 311; B. K. Packer, Holy Temple, p. 154; M. G. Romney, Covenant, p. 98; B. Young, 29 June 1873, p. 123.

³¹ 2 Nephi 31:17-18.

³² J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, August 1832, p. 12.

³³ Elder Bruce R. McConkie has said (B. R. McConkie, Probationary Test):

... everyone in the Church who is on the straight and narrow path, who is striving and struggling and desiring to do what is right, though is far from perfect in this life; if he passes out of this life while he’s on the strait and narrow, he’s going to go on to eternal reward in his Father’s kingdom.

We don’t need to get a complex or get a feeling that you have to be perfect to be saved... The way it operates is this you get on the path that’s named the “strait and narrow” (see 1 Nephi 8:20; 2 Nephi 31:18-19). You do it by entering the gate of repentance and baptism. The strait and narrow path leads from the gate of repentance and baptism, a very great distance, to a reward that’s called eternal life... What you have to do is stay in the mainstream of the Church and live as upright and decent people live in the Church—keeping the commandments, paying your tithing, serving in the organizations of the Church, loving the Lord, staying on the straight and narrow path. If you’re on that path when death comes—because this is the time and the day appointed, this the probationary estate (see Alma 34:31-32)—you’ll never fall off from it, and, for all practical purposes, your calling and election is made sure. Now, that isn’t the definition of that term, but the end result will be the same.

³⁴ J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 2 July 1839, p. 162.

³⁵ See Romans 6:4-6; *ibid.*, 9 July 1843, p. 314.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, August 1832, p. 12; Moroni 6:4.

³⁷ Truman G. Madsen explains (T. G. Madsen, Foundations, pp. 2, 5-6):

You have all been born as spirit children, and as such have a divine nature. You have now been born of mortal parents, and have been privileged, then, with a body, which is a step forward in your progression, not a step back... We are... to proceed to watch and pray, that it may be developed into the very likeness of our spirits, which are divine, and ultimately, then, to become, as it were, a product of another birth, which is the birth we call Jesus, who becomes, in the process of ordinances, our father. That's a proper use of the word "father" for Jesus, for he says in [D&C] 93:22, "all those who are begotten through me (through the ordinances) are partakers of the glory of the same (meaning his role as first-born), and are the Church of the Firstborn." Imagine. He has sacrificed for us in order that we can inherit what He alone could have claimed to be, the first-born. He's saying, "It will be as if you were [the Firstborn]; all of the blessings and powers that have been bestowed upon Me are now transmitted to you, if you are willing to come to Me." They are "begotten through me" and are "partakers of the glory of the same."

...[T]here will be another birth ahead of us, and that's called the resurrection. And then the promise that we can be like him will be literal and complete.

³⁸ Moses 6:59.