

12 November 2023

## The Sacrament

Dear Sisters and Elders,

In Moroni 4, the Nephites administered the sacrament *“according to the commandments of Christ.”* In other words, this ordinance was conducted in a specific manner. Today, worthy priesthood holders are granted permission to prepare, pass and bless the sacrament. The words of the prayer are repeated verbatim each time as we partake of those emblems. Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, *“The ordinance of the sacrament makes the sacrament meeting the most sacred and important meeting in the Church.”* (GC October 2008) The most holy gathering of the Saints is not Sunday School, not zone conference, not ward/branch council, not stake/district conference, not even general conference, but sacrament meeting. It can, however, still be difficult to make sacrament meeting a meaningful experience. It’s easy to come through the doors, sit down on a chair, pick up a green hymn book or a cell phone, and then let our minds wander. In this week’s letter, I want to share with you how we can all gain a deeper understanding of, and appreciation for, the sacred ordinance of the sacrament.

It is possible that the frequency of the sacrament ordinance causes us to take it for granted. If someone joined the church when they were 18 years old and then lived until the age of 75, they would partake of the sacrament 2,736 times! C.S. Lewis taught, *“Active habits are strengthened by repetition, but passive ones are weakened. The more often [one] feels without acting, the less he will be able ever to act, and, in the long run, the less he will be able to feel.”* In other words, if we are lazy in our preparation for, and partaking of, the sacrament, it will become meaningless to us. If, however we actively make efforts to focus and prepare ourselves for the experience, everything about the sacrament will become more meaningful to us. In the April 1946 General Conference, Elder Marion G. Romney reinforced this concept, *“Now, partaking of the sacrament is not to be a mere passive experience. We are not to remember the Lord’s suffering and death only as we may remember some purely secular historical event. Participating in the sacrament service is meant to be a vital and spiritualizing experience. Speaking of it, the Savior said: And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me.”* (3 Nephi 18:7)

We must come to the sacramental altar with a spiritual hunger and thirst for righteousness. The sacrament is a time for self-evaluation, a time to fix our course, if necessary, and to straighten out our lives. It is a time and place for us to better understand the magnitude of that sacred divine gift and the reality of being allowed to have his Spirit with us always. It is a time for us to contemplate what it really means to take His name upon us. Elder Oaks noted, *“... when we witness our willingness to take upon us the name of Jesus Christ, we are signifying our commitment to do all that we can to achieve eternal life in the kingdom of our Father. We are expressing our candidacy—our determination to strive for—exaltation in the celestial kingdom.”* As we gradually move to that spiritual level, we begin to experience a partnership with Jesus Christ. When He is constantly in our thoughts, our whole day will be different, and with this

Spirit of Christ reflected in our thoughts, language, and actions, day by day our conduct will become more unselfish, our relationships more tender, our desire to serve more constant, and we will find ourselves going about doing good.

So, how do we make sure that we reach that desired place in our lives? One of the many challenges we face are worldly distractions. While we can make a personal commitment to switch our phones to airplane mode during the meeting and seek to eliminate other diversions around us, we might still find ourselves completely unengaged in the spiritual nature of the sacrament. Perhaps a better approach would be to ponder more often on the meaning of phrases such as “always remember” and what it means to “witness” something unto God. We could also consider the meaning of the bread and water being blessed and sanctified unto our souls. We could also turn more attention to the sacrament hymns. In the October 1936 general conference, President J Reuben Clark said, *“We get nearer to the Lord through music than perhaps through any other thing except prayer.”* Pondering on the lyrics of various sacrament hymns and discussing their meanings with our companion might also help. But even with all these efforts, there would still be a gap in our appreciation for the sacrament.

To close this gap, we need to turn to the April 2022 quote from President Nelson that you know well. *“Discover the joy of daily repentance.”* In that talk, he emphasized that *“Repenting is the key to progress. Pure faith keeps us moving forward on the covenant path. Please do not fear or delay repenting. Satan delights in your misery, cut it short. Cast his influence out of your life! Start today to experience the joy of putting off the natural man. The Savior loves us always but especially when we repent.”*

To have a full experience each week with the sacrament, we need to connect the Doctrine of Christ to the ordinance: Faith, Repentance, Baptism, and the Gift of the Holy Ghost. As we have discussed often, we must live the Doctrine of Christ iteratively. It is not a one-time event. Elder Dale G Renlund taught that *“We endure to the end by repeatedly and iteratively “relying wholly upon” the doctrine and “merits” of Christ. “Repeatedly” means that we cycle through the elements in the Doctrine of Christ throughout our lives. “Iteratively” means that we change and improve with each cycle. Even though we cycle repeatedly, we are not spinning in circles like on a merry-go-round without upward motion. If that were the case, the experience would be dizzying and unproductive. Instead, as we cycle through the elements of the Doctrine of Christ, we arrive at a higher plane each time. This ascent provides new vistas and perspectives and brings us closer to the Savior. And we eventually return to the presence of our Heavenly Father as an heir to all that He has.”*

When we worthily partake of the sacrament, it means we have already qualified for and experienced the cleansing power of Jesus Christ. Worthily partaking of the sacrament then points us to the sanctifying influence of the Holy Ghost. The sacrament does not replace baptism, but it provides a repetitive link between the initial steps in the Doctrine of Christ – faith and repentance – and the later step of receiving the Holy Ghost. In this cycle, it serves a similar function as does baptism. This allows for the elements of the doctrine of Christ to be experienced as Elder Renlund taught, *“iteratively”* in our lives. To build a sure foundation on

our Savior, Jesus Christ, we must learn to trust Him and build our faith in Him and His teachings. When we act in faith by studying the scriptures to understand better Christ's mission and ministry, we will come to know the Doctrine of Christ and understand its power in our lives. Increasing faith in Jesus Christ naturally leads to repetitive and iterative repentance, which leads to eternal progression.

If we want the sacrament to become progressively more meaningful to us, then we must regularly engage with each element of the Doctrine of Christ. As our faith increases and we repent daily, we become more obedient, more consecrated, more focused on our purpose as missionaries, and this better prepares us to partake of the sacrament. This allows the Holy Ghost to have a greater influence in our lives which simply makes us better and more effective missionaries and better disciples of Jesus Christ.

None of us are perfect, and we might still lose focus from time to time. However, our Savior, Jesus Christ, is always there for us with an invitation to repent and reconnect. As Elder Holland testified in the April 2012 general conference, *"... however late you think you are, however many chances you think you have missed, however many mistakes you feel you have made or talents you think you don't have, or however far from home and family and God you feel you have traveled, I testify that you have not traveled beyond the reach of divine love. It is not possible for you to sink lower than the infinite light of Christ's Atonement shines."*

May we iteratively live the Doctrine of Christ in order to make the sacrament a more meaningful and powerful influence in our lives through the redeeming and enabling power of Jesus Christ.

All My Love,

President Kunz

*With his permission, this week's letter was adapted from a talk given by our son-in-law Brian Conley at Stake Conference on 11 November 2023 in the Tomball Texas Stake.*