

**ORDINANCES**  
1 Corinthians 15:29  
By Raymond White

**[1] Oaths, [2] Baptism, [3] Holy Ghost, [4] Sacrament, [5] Fasting, [6] Sealings**

What is an ordinance anyway? I don't mean just religious ordinances, I mean secular ones as well, like a marriage ceremony, or the signing of a grant deed to transfer property rights. Why do we do all that? Why do we have ordinances?

My answer is a bit tedious, even rambly, but there's no way to shorten it so just bear with it and it will make sense, I hope.

Much of human communication — I suspect most of human communication — is negotiation and agreement. I may ask you, "Did you like the movie?" which invites you to share your opinion. I will likely have a different opinion or none at all, but that's the point. That communication will necessarily alter my opinion in some way which is what communication is about.

Everything we say communicates something, which necessarily implies that there was a difference of opinion and that the conversation is about reconciling that difference.

Most communication is trivial, communication for communication's sake — small talk. We've learned to love just chatting — we like the company. But some communication is not trivial at all. Our most important communications are things like a wedding ceremony which culminates with "I do," or a grant deed which culminates with signing documents and recordation. Such things we call ordinances. Why do we do them?

The answer lies in the fact that we live in an analog universe and not a digital one. An analog universe has infinite granularity (or if not infinite, it is still so fizzy that it might as well be infinite) which we can't comprehend because it is infinitely detailed.

Does that affect our conversations? Our agreements? It does — in that once made, our recollections of them become quickly fuzzy and we're soon unsure just what it was that we agreed *to*. In fact, we may even be unsure that we even made an agreement.

For example: She says, "Dinner is ready." He says, "Be there in a minute." An hour later, after his television show is over, he strolls into the dining room and wonders why she is having a hissy-fit. "What did *I* do?" he defends. She says, "You *said* 'a minute' and now the food is cold." He tries to defend in the worst possible way, "I didn't mean right *then*, I was watching my favorite show." And so the battle starts.

My point is: he broke his word and he didn't even know he had given his word to break. Why? Because he was hypnotized by television and because the communication was vague. Well, vague to him, it was perfectly clear to her.

Vagueness makes communication challenging, and vagueness is the inescapable nature of an analog universe. Our analog universe is infinitely precise, and our perception of it can never be infinitely correct. For 100% correctness, we'd need a digital universe where everything is clear cut, like the computers that surround us which only have to deal with ones and zeros, yes'es and no'es. That would make life simple — also boring but simple anyway. In any case, that's not an option; life is what it is — it is analog. (Let's not worry about Quantum Mechanics and Planck's Constant. If the universe is not really analog, it sure seems to be.)

So, what's the solution? For really important agreements, how can we know just what we're agreeing to? Answer: ordinances. Ordinances give us a digital means to deal with our analog universe.

The important thing about ordinances is that they are binary, an ordinance either happened or it didn't. You either signed or you didn't. You either said "I do" or you didn't. Like a light bulb which is either on or off, and never on *and* off, and never half way in between. There are two states, on and off, and that's all. It's the principle of the excluded middle, nothing vague like the feelings of the heart or its common declaration "I love you" which can mean anything, or nothing, and it usually takes a lifetime together for a couple to find out just what those words *do* mean.

In the musical "Fiddler On the Roof", Tevia asks Golda "But do you love me?" And she answers, "I suppose I do," and maybe that is as assuring as we can ever actually get, "I suppose."

But the "I do" in a wedding ceremony, ah, we know *exactly* what that means. And if you can't figure out in a reasonable length of time just what "I do" means, and the obligations that those two words bind you to, no doubt your spouse's divorce attorney will one day happily explain it to you.

For marriages, the execution is an "I do" and an "I now pronounce you ..."

For selling a house, it's signing a grant deed and recording it.

For children, who can be just as sincere about their promises as adults, it's wrapping their pinky fingers around each other and making their pinky promise.

An ordinance is binding because it happened at a moment — *click!* And one can never deny it; unless, of course, one is willing to lie. But that's why ordinances are public and publically documented (recorded) so that one cannot hide the fact even by lying. An ordinance, then, is a promise coupled to a visible sign of commitment so that its execution (and therefore its commitment) *and its meaning* can never be disputed.

Ordinances. Our analog hearts and minds may not understand their precise meaning, but they do *have* precise meaning, and at least they are clear enough so that we have no excuse to *mis*-understand just what we have committed to. Ordinances, then, make civilization, and salvation, well, orderly.

## [1] OATHS

An oath is an ordinance, a special kind of promise — often with a raised hand so that it is visible as well as audible — which is even more binding because the oath taker essentially makes God a co-signer with words such as "I swear to God," basically signing God's name to the promise. Thus, if the oath taker breaks his oath, he makes God a complicit liar. Therefore, we ought to believe the oath because the oath taker fears God, or so we are asked to believe.

But why promises at all? Because a simple statement of intent such as "Yes, I'll be there" is not binding. Circumstances may interfere with my good intention to fulfill.

If I say to my wife, "I'll be home by six for dinner," she knows my intention and relies on it. But if my boss calls me to a special meeting so that I'm late getting home, I explain to my wife and she forgives me. The food may be cold but it's no big deal.

But if I instead say, "I'll be home by six for our daughter's school play," I may add "I promise" because I know how very important this is and they are *really* depending

on me being there *on time*. They need to know they can count on me no matter what. Then if my boss calls me to a meeting, I will say to my boss, “I’m sorry, but something important has come up and I can’t attend.” That’s the sort of thing we attach a promise to.

Now if something is really, *really* important, like maybe someone’s life depends on me keeping my promise, then I might take an oath, basically offering my soul as collateral.

Consider jury duty which calls us to take an actual oath. Do jurors ever consider the gravity of what they are being asked to swear to? Before they raise their hand and swear, they ought to listen very carefully to what they’re swearing to. They might find their souls pinned in a corner with no escape.

In the play “A Man for All Seasons” by Robert Bolt, Sir Thomas Moore languishes in prison waiting to be executed because he refuses to take the king’s oath. His daughter Margaret pleads for him to take the oath and save his own life. Here’s the conversation —

*More:* You want me to swear to the Act of Succession?

*Margaret:* “God more regards the thoughts of the heart than the words of the mouth.” Or so you’ve always told me.

*More:* Yes.

*Margaret:* Then say the words of the oath and in your heart think otherwise.

*More:* What is an oath then but words we say to God?

*Margaret:* That’s very neat.

*More:* Do you mean it isn’t true?

*Margaret:* No, it’s true.

*More:* Then it’s a poor argument to call it “neat,” Meg. When a man takes an oath, Meg, he’s holding his own self in his own hands. Like water. And if he opens his fingers *then* — he needn’t hope to find himself again. Some men aren’t capable of this, but I’d be loathe to think your father one of them.

Wow! Does that help you understand the gravity of taking an oath? No wonder Jesus said: **Matthew 5:34** *Swear not at all. :37 But let your conversation be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay...* Just say yes or no. If you’re having to promise to be believed, maybe it’s because you don’t keep your word a lot, and people know that you’re not very reliable.

For Thomas More, keeping an oath no matter what was not just philosophical posturing. He meant it, and he died for it.

But there was a moment when More did take an oath. A false accusation was levied against More by Richard Rich, and here was More’s response —

*More:* In good faith, Rich, I am sorrier for your perjury than my peril.

*Norfolk:* Do you deny this?

*More:* Yes! My lords, if I were a man who heeded not the taking of an oath, you know well I need not to be here. Now I will take an oath! If what Master Rich has said is true, then I pray I may never see God in the face! Which I would not say were it otherwise for anything on earth.

*Cromwell:* That is not evidence.

*More:* Is it probable — *is it probable* — that after so long a silence on this, the very point so urgently sought of me, I should open my mind to such a man as that?

Here is the point, well, my point anyway: If a man is willing to die over his consummate fear of taking a false oath, then when he finally does take an oath, it is impossible not to believe him.

Did they believe him? Of course they believed him, they could not *not* believe him. But they chopped his head off anyway.

When can you trust an oath? When the person taking the oath fears to take it.

Now let's talk about someone else who took an oath; five, in fact: God. God swore an oath to Noah (*Isaiah 54:9*), to Abraham (*Psalms 105:9*), to David (*2 Samuel 7:12-16*), to Christ (*Psalms 110:4*), and to the nation Israel (*Romans 11:27*).

Why is that important? Because it means that even if God changes his mind — and sometimes he does (*Genesis 6:6; Exodus 32:14; 1 Samuel 15:11,28,35*) — he cannot undo Christ's saving grace. Why? For his own oath's sake. What does that mean? That means that the salvation offered to you through Jesus Christ is irrevocable and 100% guaranteed. You can trust it absolutely.

So, you need not doubt God *on this*. Even if you're inclined to doubt him on other things, on the matter of salvation, God has bound himself by his own oath.

## [2] BAPTISM

So, what is baptism anyway? Many Christians refer to it as an “outward sign of an inward commitment” which basically means that baptism means nothing at all. What matters, and all that matters, it is said, is the inward commitment; in other words, are you genuine? And if you are, what difference could baptism possibly make?

The flaw in that argument is the same flaw in the argument that marriage is just a piece of paper. No, it is more than a piece of paper, it is the publically documented words *on* that piece of paper; namely, the spelled out terms to which the participants have publically agreed.

The heart is fickle. And memory is fickle. And what we remember agreeing to may be very different than what we actually agreed to. That's why contracts are words on paper which you either signed or didn't sign.

Grant deeds are like that. You either took title to a property and all that means or you did not. Regardless of what you and the seller agreed to verbally, or felt in your hearts, or even shook hands on, it's the recorded deed that tells all.

Just so, baptism is also a contract; specifically, a contract between you and God, and like all contracts, it is the execution that makes it binding, not merely the intent of the heart although that certainly matters. The terms of this contract, baptism, are the words of the book. To say that it is *only* an outward sign misses the point. That outward sign documents the commitment on earth and in heaven so that God and angels and *you* know just what you've committed to.

But just what *have* you committed to? You've committed to the faith and life style that the Bible is calling you to.

### [2.1] BAPTISM AND SALVATION

Let's be a little careful and document just what baptism is and what it accomplishes.

**Romans 6:3** *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? :4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

What's the symbolism here? There are several, but mainly, baptism symbolizes dying and rising again. Going into the water is like going into a grave, into death, but, not being held in its grip, rising again.

Whose death? Ours or Christ's? Actually, both. Going down into the water and coming up out of it signifies Christ's actual death and his resurrected life, but also our dying to sin and born again to a God-loving life. Also, it is a confession of guilt. He died for our sins and we are admitting that we needed him to do that for us because we are sinners. Baptism is our documented commitment, our signing on to all of that.

**Galatians 3:27** *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

Baptism does seem like a contract, or a more biblical word: a covenant. To be baptized is to be identified with Christ, to *wear* Christ, so to speak, as one wears clothing: conspicuously.

**1 Peter 3:21** *The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

Baptism does save us, but it is not a bath; it does not *clean* us from sin. But it is the evidence of our contract with God; indeed, it *is* our contract with God and thus it does save us. And it does that by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: We don't drown in the baptismal water, the baptizer doesn't hold us down, we come up to a new life, just as Christ resurrected. And because of his resurrection, he is able to save us.

## [2.2] JESUS' BAPTISM

All of that is the definition of baptism; that is, *our* baptism. But what of *his* baptism? If all of that is what *we* mean by *our* baptism, just what does Jesus' baptism mean? I mean, to him?

Of course for that answer we go to —

**Matthew 3:15** *And Jesus answering said unto him [John the Baptist] Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.*

So, there's the answer to the question: Why should Jesus be baptized since he's perfect without sin and so needs no forgiveness? Because it fulfills all righteousness.

Well, okay. But *how* does it fulfill all righteousness? Just what *all righteousness* does it fulfill? Why did God need Jesus to do this? To be an example? That seems pointless; there must be more to it than that.

Here's what I think, and you can disagree if you want.

What does baptism mean *to you*? It means you are baptized *into his death*, contracting with God that Jesus' death saves you.

Than what does baptism mean *to Jesus*? It means that *he* is likewise baptized *into his death*. *He* is contracting with God to do whatever it takes to save the human race, even if it means dying. That is the *all righteousness* that Jesus signed onto. Anything and everything to get the job done.

And then there's this possibility: When Jesus was baptized, that legitimized Jesus and his mission to be sure. But it also legitimized baptism. *He* made baptism work by accepting it as his covenant making symbol. And God accepted him *and it* (baptism) with a vocal decree from heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit.

This is much like signing and notarizing and recording a grand deed. If and when a judge reviews it to make some legal determination, when that judge accepts the deed, he is not only legitimizing the transfer of title but also the means by which it is transferred. The judge is saying in effect two things: that title was actually transferred *and* that grant deeds do actually convey title. So, likewise, when God accepted Jesus' baptism, he accepted Jesus' commitment, but he also accepted baptism as the means, or a means, of locking that commitment. Thus: baptism works.

### [2.3] BAPTISM ONLY?

In addition to understanding what baptism is, we ought also to understand what baptism isn't. And, so, I will brazenly ask a brazen question which will likely annoy some of you. Is baptism the *only* way to heaven? And I answer even more brazenly, no, it is not.

Let's begin by reviewing this verse —

***Galatians 3:27*** *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*

This may sound trivial, but it's not. The verse is saying that baptism links us to Christ but says nothing about salvation or heaven. The inference is that baptism, rather than getting us into heaven, gets us to *the man* who gets us to heaven. Baptism is not the way to heaven, it is the way *to the way* to heaven. *Jesus* is the way, not baptism. And that is not a trivial distinction.

This is merely an inference which, of course, proves nothing. But it is a launching point, so, let's continue.

***Mark 16:16*** *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*

That *seems* clear enough, but it leaves us with some interesting questions: What of those who believe and are not baptized? What of those who are baptized and don't believe? And of course, what of those who are neither?

The straight answer is that those people are not saved. But the text doesn't say that. The only answer to those questions is maybe or maybe not. The only affirmation in this verse is that a life of faith committed to by baptism results in salvation. Maybe that's all we really need to know, but it does leave us to wonder about a curious omission.

Now, Mormons believe they have a good answer to that curious omission —

**3 Nephi 11:34** *And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned.*

Well, that's that then. Everyone else is out.

But is that what the verse is saying? Actually, it's not. I hate to nit-pick, but I have to nit-pick (it's the engineer in me). The text doesn't say those who believe not *or* are not baptized, it says those who believe not *and* are not baptized. A little set theory math will leave us with an uncomfortable conclusion.

Yes, it is true that —

Faith and Baptism result in Salvation (**Mark 16:16**); and,

Not Faith and Not Baptism result in Damnation (**3 Nephi 11:34**).

But that leaves us asking ourselves —

Faith and Not Baptism results in what? And,

Baptism and not faith results in what?

Neither **Mark** or **3 Nephi** answer those two questions.

Hold that thought but let's move on. If we can find a group of people who are in heaven but who were never baptized, then we have proven that baptism is not *the* way to heaven. And it is easy to find just such a group of people —

**Moroni 8:9** ... *it is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children. :12 But little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world; if not so, God is a partial God, and also a changeable god, and a respecter to person; for haw many little children have died without baptism! :15 For awful is the wickedness to suppose that God saveth one child because of Baptism, and the other must perish because he hath no baptism.*

Clearly, children don't need baptism.

You may object: That's foul — we already knew that. And they are not an exception — no one *else* gets in without baptism.

I answer: You already knowing it doesn't mitigate my point, which is: That *anyone* gets in without baptism *is* an exception which *proves* that baptism is not *the* way to heaven.

You may object again: But the reason children get free admission is because they are pure and perfect.

I answer again: That sidesteps the point. *Why* they get a free pass is a distraction. *That* they get a free pass is the point. To restate: That *anyone* gets in without baptism means that baptism is not *the* way to heaven. But, so that my point does not fall victim to

this distraction, I will note that **Moroni 8:9** says nothing about children being pure and perfect. What that verse does say is that the reason they get a free pass is because they are already alive in Christ and have been from the foundation of the world. In other words, not because of their merits but because of his sovereign choice. Now, we can surmise that he makes that choice because young children are incapable of making moral decisions, but that is certainly not merit.

So, even in the case of children, we see that it is not personal righteousness that saves, it is Christ who saves *whoever he chooses*, and in this case, he chooses children.

Now, to drive this point home, there are these verses —

**1 Nephi 10:6** All mankind were in a lost and fallen state.

**2 Nephi 2:9** ...make intercession for all the children of men

**2 Nephi 9:21** he suffereth [for] men, women, and children

**Mosiah 3:16** Christ atoneth for their [children's] sins

**Alma 22:14** man could not merit anything of himself

**Ether 3:2** because of the fall our natures have become evil

**D&C 74:7** little children are holy being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ

**D&C 93:38** Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God. [redemption did this, not childhood innocence]

**Moses 6:54** the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt

**Moses 6:55** Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin

To repeat: Baptism is not the way to salvation, it is the way *to the way* to salvation. Jesus is the way, the only way, for everyone including children. Baptism is the way *to him* for *most* of us but not *all* of us — certainly not young children whom Jesus just elects.

But that drives us to a next question: If children get in without baptism, is there anyone else who gets in without baptism? Now, I know that question nudges close to heresy, but let's consider that question seriously. And by seriously, I mean, scripturally.

**Matthew 9:2** Jesus seeing their faith said to the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee. :3 And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.

Now let's ask ourselves: What prevents this man from walking into heaven? Well, not being dead yet, of course. But aside from that. Suppose he died that night, would he go to heaven or not? A Mormon might argue: no, because he hasn't been baptized.

But what keeps a man, any man, from heaven? Sin. And only sin. If sin is vanquished, by whatever means, nothing bars the man from heaven. Jesus personally forgave this man, so what more could he possibly need?

**Luke 23:43** And Jesus said unto him [the thief on the cross], Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.

This man, the thief on the cross, repented on the day he died and Jesus accepted him. Now a Mormon would argue, but paradise is not heaven. Nice try but that argument fails for the simple reason that paradise is a holding tank (so to speak) for righteous souls who will be going to heaven (*Alma 40:12*). So when Jesus accepted him into paradise, he also accepted him into heaven.

But let's not leave it to the Bible to establish this point, let's get some help from the Book of Mormon.

*Enos 5 Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee :7 How? :8 Because of thy faith in Christ*  
*Alma 14:11 The Lord receiveth them unto himself* [new believers martyred]  
*Alma 19:29 Jesus who has saved me from an awful hell* [queen's ecstatic coma]  
*Alma 24:26 no reason to doubt but what they were saved* [battlefield converts]  
*Alma 24:27 Lord worketh in many ways to the salvation* [God can be creative]  
*Alma 26:34 we know that they have gone to their God* [more battlefield converts]  
*D&C 137:6* [Joseph Smith] *marveled how it was that he* [brother Alvin] *had obtained an inheritance in that kingdom, seeing that he had departed this life before the Lord had set his hand to gather Israel the second time, and had not been baptized for the remission of sins.* [unbaptized Alvin already in heaven]

This is my list of people, adults, who found their way to heaven without baptism.

Why am I pointing this out? Because it's what the book says, and, after all, isn't that what we're interested in? If Jesus or God says someone is forgiven, then that someone is forgiven. Ought not we to believe what our own scriptures are telling us?

Does reading uncomfortable verses make me an anti-Mormon? Dear Lord, I hope not. But reading and believing the scriptures can be risky business. The words you find there might lead you to ideas that conflict with ideas that you already have and hold dear. And when that happens, what do you do then? That is your decision to make.

#### [2.4] THEN WHY BAPTISM?

So then, if baptism is not *the* way to heaven, why do we bother with it? Why don't we just *believe* (saved by faith alone) as the Evangelicals do? Because baptism works! It's what God has given *us*. I would be thrilled to see Jesus walking about forgiving everyone, but he's not here, he's in heaven preparing a place for us.

But he's left us with some powerful things in his absence: the Holy Ghost, a priesthood, and a baptism that works, not only for the living, but also for the dead. And that matters — big time!

Should I believe that Mormon baptism is the *only* baptism which works? I don't *know* that to be true, but I suspect it. Why? Because it is the only completely *unselfish* baptism on the planet; that is, it is available to *everyone*; that is, the dead as well as the living, and it is the only such baptism in Christendom. That fact alone legitimizes Mormon baptism specifically, just as Jesus being baptized legitimized baptism generally. Isn't that enough?

That is not to say that everyone needs baptism, I've just proved otherwise. But it is to say that everyone who does need baptism (has no other means to salvation) has access to it. What other church offers that?

So what do *you* need to do? You need to do what God has put in your heart to do. For me, it's to follow the Mormon faith. For you, well, that's between you and God, isn't it? *I* think that God wants you to be a Mormon and seal your family together. But that's just me. You must go where God leads you.

## [2.5] BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD

This uniquely Mormon notion comes from a single verse in the Bible —

*1 Corinthians 15:29* *Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?*

Christians were, at the time of Paul, performing a peculiar ordinance: they were baptizing for the dead. And Paul used that as a debate point defending the uniquely Christian notion of physical resurrection: Why baptize for the dead if there is no resurrection?

Joseph Smith picked up on that and understood its monumental meaning: it solved a fundamental Christian problem.

Here's the problem: Does one really need Christ to be saved? Yes or no? If yes, then how can Christians believe in a heartless God who damns people who've had no chance, from birth to death, to hear and believe the gospel message? But if no, then how can we believe Jesus who insisted, "I am *the way*"? That is the Christian dilemma.

Joseph Smith understood that Baptism for the Dead resolves that dilemma. Yes, Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, there is no other. However, death does not slam the door, there is still a way; namely: *1 Corinthians 15:29*.

This realization, actually revelation, came to Joseph Smith in 1841 just three years before his martyrdom.

*Doctrine and Covenants 124:32* *For verily I say unto you, that after you have had sufficient time to build a house to me [temple], wherein the ordinance of baptizing for the dead belongeth ... 128:11* *Now the great and grand secret of the whole matter, and the summum bonum [Latin: greatest good] of the whole subject that is lying before us, consists in obtaining the powers of the Holy Priesthood. For him to whom these keys are given there is no difficulty in obtaining a knowledge of facts in relation to the salvation of the children of men, both as well for the dead as for the living.*

This simple notion frees us from having to decide between the two awful alternatives: Jesus only and thus everyone outside of the perimeter of the gospel message is damned, or Jesus is not the only way and our gospel message is a lie. Baptism for the Dead gives us a middle ground — Jesus is the only way, but Mormon baptism gives access to everyone.

But it also straddles us with a whole lot of work to do; namely, baptizing everyone who has ever lived, and that is exactly the task that God has given to Mormons.

I used to fret, what if some other church copies us, so that we were no longer unique? Then recently (2012 I think) it dawned on me that I needn't worry because no

one would foolishly try to baptize the whole human race; no one, that is, except a people to whom God has said, “You *must* do this.” Just like no one would foolishly build an ark on a plain, but Noah did; and no one would foolishly die on a cross to save the world, but Jesus did.

*1 Corinthians 1:25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

And so we do it — baptize for the dead — because it works and because God has said to us: we must.

### [3] THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST

Following each baptism, there is a second ordinance called the Gift of the Holy Ghost. The initiate sits in a chair surrounded by priesthood holders who lay their hands on the initiate’s head and confer the Holy Ghost.

What’s that all about? It is said to be giving the Holy Ghost, but that can’t be quite right because if there were no Holy Ghost present until that moment, then the convert would never have been converted in the first place. Conviction and conversion come by the Holy Ghost, and yet the words are “Receive the Holy Ghost.” So, what’s going on? Is it a blessing? Well, of course it’s a blessing, all good things are blessings and this ordinance provides an opportunity to convey blessings, but that’s not what it’s about either.

Here’s what I think it’s about. The ordinance is also called a *confirmation*. What does confirmation mean and just what does the ordinance confirm?

Let’s return again to our grant deed comparison. Your signature executes the deed, but someone else has to sign it as well. Who? A Notary Public. The notary’s signature is the confirming signature of a trusted third party, a public agent, who attests that you really are who you say you are and that your signature is genuine. So, two signatures are really required to execute the deed: yours which is your agreement, and the notary’s which is your guaranteeing witness.

#### [3.1] TWO WITNESSES

Now that makes sense, and that takes us back to a fundamental point of law.

*Deuteronomy 17:6 At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.*

This is common sense. The law has real power, real *teeth*, and that is dangerous. That’s why the ninth commandment: *Thou shalt not bear false witness*. And so, the law demands two witnesses.

But what’s the point? The point is that with two witnesses, you can interrogate them separately to determine if they are telling the truth or if they are lying.

An example of this is the apocryphal story of *Suzanne and the Elders* which can be found in the Catholic Bible. This story is sort of the reverse of the Genesis story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. In the story of Joseph, it is the man who is falsely accused of violating his boss's wife. In the story of Suzanne, it is the young woman who is falsely accused of being unfaithful to her husband.

Just as Suzanne is about to be condemned by two lying elders who had hoped to seduce her, the prophet Daniel enters the court room and asks the justices if they've done their due diligence — did they separate the two witnesses and interrogate them separately? It happens that they had not. So Daniel basically takes over the trial, (he has the gravitas to do that), separates the witnesses and asks each this question: In Suzanne's garden, there are several trees. Under which tree did she commit this infidelity you claim to have witnessed? The two elders identify two different trees and so Daniel has trapped them in their lie. Thus Suzanne is acquitted and the two lying elders are executed.

And that is the point of requiring two witnesses. Confirmation means confirming their testimonies.

We call giving the Gift of the Holy Ghost a confirmation. It is not giving the Holy Ghost (he's already there), it is giving confirmation. That is: he is a second witness, examining the initiate's heart, affirming that the heart is right and the commitment is real. Thus, the saving act (baptism) is sealed (*Ephesians 1:13, 4:30*).

### [3.2] WITNESSES

Do the two witnesses have to be two human witnesses? No, they do not. Jesus gives us this example —

*John 5:31 If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true, :32 There is another that beareth witness of me :37 The Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me.*

His point is right on. Jesus has two witnesses: himself and his father; meaning of course, the conspicuous miracles. The miracles are his second witness. That Jewish leaders rejected the miracles is their problem, the confirming proof of miracles ought to be obvious enough to anyone with a lick of sense.

So, what would that mean in a court of law today? Well, if you had an eye witness and a fingerprint, that would be two witnesses. How about a fingerprint and some DNA? That would also be two witnesses.

### [3.3] THE CONFIRMATION

When you are baptized, you are making a public commitment and declaration that you now belong to God.

Well, that's nice, but that's only one witness, just your word. How does God know you are genuine? Where is the confirmation? Where is your Notary Public so to speak?

That would be the Holy Ghost. Your baptism is your witness; the Holy Ghost is your notary who confirms your witness.

The Holy Ghost enters you, has a serious look at your heart, sees what you really are made of, and reports his conclusion back to God. And that, if you are genuine, Jesus calls, “born again.”

*John 3:8 The wind bloweth wehere it listeth; and thou hear the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh; and wither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the spirit.*

You can't see the wind but you hear it and feel it and see its affect on the trees. So too, you can't see the Holy Ghost come and go but you can see the changed life it causes.

### [3.4] LATER

But what if the changed life comes later? Eight-year-olds are not generally committed to much. Sometimes, but often not.

I can remember the moment I really gave my life to Jesus and it was a long time later, more than a decade after I was baptized. When I was baptized, I can't say that I had any idea at all what it meant. Maybe the Holy Ghost saw something in me that I was not privy to or maybe not. I don't know, but I doubt that he had anything positive to report back to God about me.

But I do know when *I knew* I was his, and it was not at my baptism.

If one's baptism is not a true commitment at the moment of baptism, it can be later. Many marriages are like that, kind of superficial at the beginning but become genuine later. I believe that the Holy Ghost sort of checks in from time to time to get a status update and to again nudge you to that commitment you pretended to make at baptism. If that commitment never happens than the baptism meant nothing. But the moment that commitment does happen, God notices and accepts it — you don't have to be baptized again.

### [3.5] THE SEALING

Here is what the Holy Ghost is; that is, in the legal sense:

*Ephesians 1:13 ...in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the holy spirit of promise, :14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession ...*

The word *earnest* in Greek literally mean *engagement ring*. So we have a picture here of a wedding-to-be, and the guarantee that the wedding will happen is the engagement ring which signifies the earnestness of both parties. That's the Holy Ghost assuring and sealing your future position with God.

That is what receiving the Gift of the Holy Ghost means.

After that, as long as the Holy Ghost is in a sealing mood, the person giving the blessing takes advantage and throws in some other blessings as well, whatever comes to his mind. Why not? The ordinance is sort of a blank check on God's high generosity.

## [4] SACRAMENT

Mormons call it sacrament. Catholics call it communion. I suppose other churches have other names for it, but by whatever name, it's a weekly reconnection with our baptismal covenant.

And why is that? Because without it we might soon forget.

Returning again to the grant deed, there is a monthly ordinance of sorts that reminds us of our commitment to that property we say we own, but more likely owns us; and that is, the mortgage payment. And if that isn't enough of a reminder, there is an annual reminder called property tax.

In a similar fashion, we remind ourselves of our baptismal covenants by taking the sacrament.

But is it necessary? I mean necessary in that same sense that a mortgage payment is necessary — you'd better pay it or else.

Sacrament isn't *required*, but perhaps it is *necessary* in the sense that without it our self-imposed spiritual intentions will likely drift, which we don't want to happen. And so we submit ourselves to the sacrament and re-promise to God and to ourselves the commitments we have made.

### [4.1] FEET

This ordinance of sacrament was instituted by the Lord at the Last Supper the night before his crucifixion. But earlier at that supper, something happened that gave us a picture of what the sacrament is about and maybe inspired Jesus to institute it.

When they walked into the room, their sandaled feet were dirty. That was not unusual, dirt streets and bare feet generally resulted in dirty feet, that was the norm. But when people came in for dinner, they washed their feet.

But that created a tension because feet washing implied a ranking order, and so a squabble ensued. "You wash my feet." "No, you wash *my* feet." And so to put an end to the squabble, Jesus humbly got down on his knees and began to wash everyone's feet.

That, of course, humiliated everyone because no one thought they were better than Jesus. Peter particularly felt humbled, and when Jesus got to him, Peter objected —

*John13:8 Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. :9 Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head. :10 Jesus saithe unto him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean ...*

There are many lessons in this quick exchange between Peter and Jesus, but the lesson to focus on right now is that Peter didn't need a bath for dinner, he was already clean, he just needed his feet cleaned because walking through the streets, you can't avoid getting your feet dirty.

That's life, isn't it? And that's baptism and that's the sacrament. When we're baptized and give our lives to Christ, we are cleaned — once and for all. But life happens. And we can't walk through the dirty streets of life without getting dirt on our feet. So,

what do we do about that? Take a bath every time our feet get dirty? Get baptized every time the world's dirt clings to us? No. All we need is to let Jesus wash our feet; that is, to participate in the lovely, on-going ordinance of the sacrament, and recommit each week to the lifetime commitments we made at baptism.

*1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin.*

#### [4.2] A PRACTICAL WEEKLY COVENANT

In addition to recommitting to our baptismal covenant, the Sacrament also gives us an opportunity to make a *new* covenant with God each week, and that might be a very practical thing to do.

Many people carry around with them a compulsive behavior that is injurious to themselves or to others, and no matter how hard they try, they just can't *finally* shake it off. It might be an addiction to alcohol, or tobacco, or porn, or gambling, or screaming, or gluttony, or whatever. *The* characteristic of sin — what makes sin sin — is harm. Jesus summed up all the commandments into just two: love God and love your fellow man. In other words, get the greatest good for yourself and for others. Everything else then, whatever works against good is, by definition, harm, and therefore sin. Why? Because God loves us and actually wants us to be happy.

So, how do we defeat sinful behaviors if they have a firm grip on us, so that even though we've made a lifelong covenant, we find ourselves breaking it? (Even Paul had such a problem, **Romans 7:14-25**.) The answer is simple. It's not easy, but it is simple: Make a weekly covenant. Maybe you can't shun the sin for a lifetime — an alcoholic is never "cured" but only "recovering," so says AA — but you can, at least, get through one week, this week. Then you can deal with next week, and the next, and so on, until that becomes the habit and the pattern of your life.

The place to begin the week is at the Sacrament, where you can make a new covenant with God: "God, this week anyway, I will not do this thing. Then next Sunday, we'll talk about next week."

#### [4.3] BREAD AND WATER

What is the difference between the bread and the water? Why two symbols? We commonly suppose that they are both symbols of his death. The water certainly —

*Doctrine and Covenants 20:79 ...that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son which was shed for them ...*

That he, who was innocent, was executed as a criminal for us who are criminals, is the point of the whole thing.

But what about the bread? We focus on the breaking of the bread to symbolize his broken flesh, making the bread also a symbol of his death.

But is that really the point of it? As though we need two symbols for the same thing?

Let me give you another thought —

*Doctrine and Covenants 20:77 ...that they may eat it in remembrance of the body of thy Son ...*

This says nothing about his broken flesh and nothing about his death. What it speaks of is *his body! Period!* That is: this is him! In the flesh! Immanuel! God with us! That God has a body *to* break.

*1 John 4:2 Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.*

What is this? This is the Christmas story. The point is not just that Jesus died for us, but that he first came in the flesh so that he *could* die for us. That's the point.

The first point, the bread, is that he came. The second point, the water, is that he died. Those two, coupled together, are the messages of the sacrament.

Also, the second seals the first, just as the Holy Ghost seals the baptism. Jesus was born to accomplish a great task. That task was completed by his death; the intention was sealed by the blood.

## [5] FASTING

Food is a gift from God. (*Genesis 1:30*) *I have given every green herb for meat.* And it's a good gift. How do we know? Because God made flavors. He could have made everything taste like, well, grass, I suppose, but instead, he made eating pleasurable.

Well, if food is so good, then why should we ever fast? Why not just eat, eat, eat? If some is good, more is better. Right? Wrong! Excess makes good things bad. Money is good (*Deuteronomy 8:18*). A wife is good (*Proverbs 18:22*). But too much money and too many wives (ask Solomon) is a bad thing (*Deuteronomy 18:18*). Food is like that. Moderation is good, gluttony is bad.

But beyond moderate eating, there is non-eating, or fasting. Why do people fast? The Bible indicates that people fast in response to situations. The meaning of a fast, then, is derived, not from a formality, a ritual, but from a reality.

What is the point of fasting? Is it an ordinance? Maybe. But if so, then why? Do we fast to impress God with our willingness to go without food? If that's the point, doesn't that seem rather silly? Why would God care?

The point of fasting is not to impress God with our going hungry but that *we* are impressed and angry and frightened and despairing about things that trouble us. The point is, when we're upset, we're in no mood to eat. When we're dealing with upsetting things, food is the last thing on our minds. Problems make us lose our appetite.

But we do fast as an ordinance. And if it is an ordinance then it's fair to ask: What is an ordinance? And how is an ordinance different from the reality it represents?

Let's once more consider the ordinance of a grant deed, or the ordinance of a marriage license. Those essential documents are different from the underlying reality they represent. The deed represents the transfer of property ownership — "it's your property now and not mine." The marriage license documents the actual living together as husband

and wife. The paper that documents the action (ordinance) is different than the action itself (being together).

So, what about fasting? If it is an ordinance (and it is) we ought to ask ourselves, an ordinance representing what? Here is a list of biblical fastings and the events that prompted them. As you read them, see if you can tell what they all have in common. Something should jump out at you. Here's my short list:

*Exodus 34:28* Moses fasted in the presence of God.

*Leviticus 16:29* Israel fasted because of their sins.

*Joel 1:14* Israel fasted because of a locust plague.

*Nehemiah 1:3-4* Nehemiah fasted over a broken wall.

*Psalms 35:13* David fasted because of too many enemies.

*2 Samuel 3:35* David fasted for slain Abner.

*2 Chronicles 20:3* Israel fasted because they were attacked.

*Ezra 8:21* Ezra fasted because they had no army.

*Isaiah 58:5-7* God said fast for wickedness and hunger.

*Matthew 17:21* Jesus said fast when you confront Satan.

*Matthew 4:1-2* Jesus fasted when he confronted Satan.

*Matthew 9:15* We fast because Jesus is not here.

Do you see anything in common? If not, here's my long list

#### [5.1] OLD TESTAMENT

*Judges 20:25* Benjamin...destroyed 18,000 men :**26** Israel...wept...and fasted...

*1 Samuel 1:7* therefore she [Hannah] wept and did not eat.

*1 Samuel 7:6* they fasted and said there, We have sinned against the LORD.

*1 Samuel 14:24* And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted any food.

*1 Samuel 31:12* the valiant men... took the body of Saul :**13** and buried them and fasted

*2 Samuel 1:11* Then David :**12** mourned and wept and fasted until even for Saul

*2 Samuel 3:35* So do God to me...if I taste bread [David's grief over Abner's death]

*2 Samuel 12:15* the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare :**16** and David fasted

*2 Samuel 12:22 While the child was alive I fasted and wept :23 but now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again?*

*1 Kings 21:27 When Ahab heard [Elijah's] words, he rent his clothes...and fasted.*

*1 Chronicles 10:12 the... men took away the body of Saul and buried [him] and fasted*

*2 Chronicles 20:3 Jehoshaphat feared...and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.*

*Ezra 8:22 I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers :23 so we fasted*

*Nehemiah 1:3 the wall of Jerusalem is broken :4 I wept and mourned and fasted.*

*Nehemiah 9:1 assembled with fasting :2 confessed their sins and iniquities of their fathers.*

*Esther 4:3 there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping,  
...*

*Esther 4:16 fast for me...I also and my maidens will fast...and if I perish, I perish.*

*Jeremiah 14:12 When they fast, I will not hear their cry...*

*Daniel 10:2 I Daniel was mourning three full weeks :3 I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself...*

*Jonah 3:7 ...Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing...*

*Zechariah 7:3 ...Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done...*

What do all these Old Testament fastings have in common? They were, all of them, reactions to some stressful, negative event — death, or war, or sin, or whatever. Not eating, not being hungry is the body's natural reaction to bad things. So if you want to show God that you are genuinely concerned about something, don't eat.

## [5.2] NEW TESTAMENT

*Matthew 4:1 Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil :2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights...*

Going into battle, in this case spiritual battle, is serious business.

**Luke 2:36** *And there was one Anna a prophetess :37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fasting and prayers night and day. :38 ... and spake of him [Jesus] to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*

For a young widow to have to face a long life of aloneness (84 years) is certainly an anguishing experience. What might a person in that situation do with all that time? Anna fasted and prayed and did a lot of temple work. And at the end of that long, lonely, faithful life, she was blessed to see the child messiah and prophecy for him.

**Luke 5:34** *...Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?*

Why would anyone want to fast when Jesus is with them? His presence would be a time of joy not sadness, a time to feast not fast. We fast because we're *not* with him, when he is somewhere else. He's in heaven, we're here, and we sorrow because of the separation.

**Acts 13:2,3** *As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*

Why a fast? They fasted because they felt the stress of this heavy responsibility, of doing the job right. Should they set apart Barnabas and Paul or not? This was serious business, not to be dealt with frivolously.

**2 Corinthians 6:5** *In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings.*

Maybe this is an institutional fast that Paul is talking about (fasted and prayed that he wouldn't get beat up anymore) but more likely he is talking about going hungry from the stress of watching out for his own safety and the safety of other.

**2 Corinthians 11:27** *In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

This is a repeat of **6:5**. Paul's fastings were spans of hunger along with all the other troubles that came his way.

So even in the New Testament, all fasting was negative, from sorrow or fear or deep concern for something. Plagues, destroyed cities, invading armies, crime, slain friends, hunger, poverty, sin, Satan — these are the kinds of things that make us fast. In other words, sickening things, that make us lose our appetites so that food is the last thing on our minds. Fasting is the natural, physical response to grief, to fear, to stressful things that demand our entire attention. It is the result of concern, the proof that one is not taking a situation lightly.

Positive realities don't make us fast, they make us feast. Negative realities make us fast.

It's also important is to notice that fasting was always real; that is, a fast was always about *something* that was actually happening. They never fasted just to have a fast. That makes a regular institutional fasting seem rather purposeless, doesn't it? Should we not then try to find purpose in such fasts by focusing our attention on real life problems? Regular fasting then becomes an opportunity for us to take our problems to God and say, "God, *this* is what's upsetting me. Would you please help me fix this?"

This is not to say that a planned fast is disingenuous, but if a fast never moves beyond its formality, beyond its ritual, to some reality, then what is the point? How can a fast draw God's attention to a situation if the faster isn't even attentive to the situation?

You want to move God? To do what? If you don't know, how do you expect God to know? If you are not concerned, why do you think God should be?

Fast, yes. The Bible says you should. But, for heaven's sake, fast for *something*, something that actually moves you and causes you concern. That should be easy; there is much to be concerned about.

### [5.3] IS THERE EVER A WRONG FAST?

God tells Isaiah that, yes indeed, there is such a thing as a wrong fast. That is a fast where the people have missed the point.

*Isaiah 58:1 Show my people their transgression and the house of Jacob their sins.:2 Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God. :3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? [God, do you see our fasting? Are you impressed?] Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, [You're just having a party] and exact all your labours [you oppress your employees].:5 Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?*

What God is saying is: do you really think that skipping a meal will impress me?

Well then, if all of that is a wrong fast, then what is a right fast? God continues and tells us that too.

*Isaiah 58:6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the band of wickedness [fix injustice], to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?:7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh [especially help out your family]?:8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward. :9 Then shalt thou call and the LORD shall answer...*

Here are the main points of Isaiah's admonition.

**First:** Feel genuine sorrow, grief, fear, humiliation, loss, for the tragedy that has beset you or someone you care about. Isaiah said, "You're trying to convince me that you're grieving and *ye find pleasure?*" In other words, your fast is not convincing me.

**Second:** Do something about it. Feed the poor, do justice, and so forth. In other words, work to resolve the problem that you are claiming you are so stressed over. Don't just dump it on God to deal with, *you* deal with it. Try to fix the problem that you claim you're so concerned about.

**Third:** Feel your grief over the right things. Isaiah gives us a list. There is righteous grief over injustice and poverty. But there is also unrighteous grief, like for example Cain's jealousy of Abel, or David's lust for Bathsheba, or King Ahab's pining for Naboth's vineyard. **1 Kings 21:4** ... *And he [Ahab] laid him down upon his bed...and would eat no bread.* That's fasting (Ahab couldn't eat) but Ahab was fasting for the wrong thing. He was so grieved that he couldn't get someone's else's property that he committed murder. Here's a proper thing to grieve for: how about abortion? We murder over a million babies a year in America. If that doesn't turn your stomach, nothing will.

**Fourth:** Do all that and *then* God will take notice of your fasting and will bless you. The ordinance loses its meaning if we don't keep reality in view.

Here is an example of a fast that accomplished nothing good at all. It merely invigorated a wrong thinking people to do a wrong thing.

**Jeremiah 36:9** ...*they proclaimed a fast...:10 Then read Baruch in the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the LORD ... :23* ...*he [the king] cut it [Jeremiah's scroll] with a pinknife, and cast it into the fire.*

This fast began right, (the people heard Jeremiah's words), but ended wrong — they rejected his words, cut them up and burned them. So the fast proved to be useless.

#### [5.4] DO WE NEED AN INSTITUTIONAL FAST?

Before we decide to fast, we should first understand what we are fasting for. If someone asks me to fast, I first ask, "Why?"

When the Jews return to Judea from their Diaspora, they asked their prophet this very question: Should we continue to fast?

**Zechariah 7:1** *And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chisleu. [fast for the fall of Jerusalem.] :2* *When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer and Regemmelech, and their men, to pray before the LORD.:3* *And to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the Lord of hosts, and to the prophet, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?*

This is a fair question. We mourned and fasted over the destruction of Jerusalem. But now we're back and have rebuilt the city and the temple, so, should we continue to fast?

Here's God's answer.

***Zechariah 7:4** Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto me, saying, :5 Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?:6 And when ye did eat [had a feast] and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?:7 Should ye not hear the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and the plain?:8 And the word of the LORD came unto Zechariah saying, :9 Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: :10 And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.*

During the Diaspora, Jews fasted in grief for the loss of their temple. But when the Diaspora was over and the Jews were returning to Jerusalem, they asked Zechariah a fair question: should we still keep that fast?

God answered the question with a question: “Did you ever fast for me or were you fasting for yourselves? Did you ever feast for me or were you feasting for yourselves?” In other words, if you think that maybe a fast or a feast is appropriate, examine the motive. If you have a fast, or a feast, are you having it for the right reasons?

That brings us to this question: Why an ordinance? We have a regular institutional fast because we need to be continually reminded that things are bad even when things are good. Why? Because when life is good we tend to forget God. “Fortune does not change people; it unmask them.” (Suzanne Necker)

So we have a fast to remind us. But if we forget what the fast is about, then it doesn't mean much. We need an institutional fast, yes, but we need to keep it right, to keep us in continual reminder of our fragileness and constant dependence on God.

And by the way, God did finally answer their question —

***Zechariah 8:19** ...The fast of the fourth month...shall be...cheerful feasts...*

God did change their fast, he changed it into a feast. They are back home and things had improved greatly for them.

Here are other institutional fasts in the Bible.

***Leviticus 23:27** tenth day of seventh month...day of atonement...ye shall afflict your souls.*

“Afflict your souls” probably meant fast.

*Esther 9:29* And Esther the Queen wrote :**31** to confirm the days of Purim ...as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry.

Purim is the day of fasting to remember when the Jews almost lost everything.

*Jeremiah 36:6* Therefore go thou, and read ... in the ears of the people in the LORD's house upon the fasting day.

The Jews had a fast day, and on that day, Jeremiah went to the temple to read God's word to them. Their fasting accomplished something anyway, for awhile they were in a mood to listen to him.

### [5.5] THE POWER OF FASTING

*Matthew 17:19* Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? :**21** This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

You want to do battle with evil? Then be sincere about it. And one good way to cement your sincerity is to not eat. Fasting focuses your attention, if you let it.

### [5.6] TESTIMONIES

What about testimonies? What's that about? When we are fasting, is it important to stand up and tell others why we are fasting?

*Deuteronomy 26:2* Thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth ... :**3** And thou shalt go unto the priest ... :**4** And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand ... :**5** And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous :**6** And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage :**7** And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression :**8** And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders :**9** And he hath brought us into this place, and hath give us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey.

This is so much like a Fast and Testimony Meeting. *First:* We give our tithes and offerings. *Second:* We declare publicly that we remember the problems that we used to have. *Third:* We declare publicly that we remember that God has delivered us from those problems and has blessed us with good things. And *fourth:* Therefore, we ought to be confident that he can resolve our current problems too.

A testimony connected with a fast is either a declaration of a problem (God, I need your help), or of a problem that God has resolved for you (God, thank you). But always it has a negative root. That's why it's a fast.

### [5.7] THE OPPOSITE OF FAST IS FEAST

You don't fast for positive things, you feast — like at a wedding. You don't fast at a wedding, unless you despise your new son-in-law with his piercings and tattoos, *then* you might fast and hope your precious daughter comes to her senses before the I-do's.

After all the fasting we've talked about, we should now talk about some actual feasting. What do we feast for?

*2 Chronicles 7:8* Also at the same time Solomon kept the feast seven days and all Israel with him... **:10** ...glad and merry in heart...

This was because of their joy of the newly built and newly dedicated temple that God had conspicuously accepted.

*Esther 9:17* made it a day of feasting & gladness.

When the danger was past, when Esther had her victory and saved the Jews from her husband's rash decree, they had a feast. Of course. It was time to celebrate and be happy.

*Jeremiah 16:8* Thou shalt not also go into the house of feasting, to sit with them to eat and to drink.

A feast would be a fine thing to have. Let's celebrate and have a party and be happy. That would be nice, but not when a great disaster is coming. They were in a party mood because they didn't know a great disaster was coming. Jeremiah was telling them but they weren't listening, they were too busy partying.

### [5.8] SO, WHY ARE YOU FASTING?

Are you fasting to impress God? That doesn't impress God. Are you fasting because your church says you should? That doesn't impress God either. But maybe this impresses God: that strong negative passion — sorrow, grief, fear, etc. — deep in you about *something* that forces you to act. *That* impresses God.

What something? Well, *you'd* better know. If you don't know what you feel sorrow, grief, fear, etc. for, how do you expect God to know? Want to impress God with your problems? Maybe you'd better impress yourself first. Maybe at least think about them, and allow yourself to feel the emotion that you should be feeling about your problems and other people's problems. Then maybe God will pay attention to them, if you've paid attention to them first.

Write down your issues can help. Then at least you know what they are.

There's a device that I use of my own contrivance. In the Mormon church we make our donations with a donation slip, and we keep a carbon copy for ourselves. On the back of that carbon copy, I write down the things that I am concerned about — loved ones who are hurting, world problems, murdered babies and so forth. I do believe that God can read. And, if I am attentive to my own problems enough to write them down, I believe God is attentive enough to read them, if not from the piece of paper, then from my heart.

## [6] SEALINGS

Finally, there are the temple sealing ordinances unique to the Mormon faith. These are so major a topic that I won't include them here except to refer you to another article of mine, *Marriage in Heaven*.

I will add that the capstone of the Mormon faith (not the cornerstone, Christ is the cornerstone) is that families can be forever.

And finally, this: Those who love someone deeply, feel a double pain when death claims that someone. First, there's the empathetic pain that the one we loved had to die. But, second, there is the pain of personal loss, of separation; that is, having to say good-bye to your dearest and having to believe that the parting is forever. The Mormon sealing ordinances offer an alternative to that.

That's enough for you to think about for now. If that last paragraph piqued your interest, then go find some Mormons or visit a Mormon temple and ask this question: "Is it true that Mormons believe that my marriage can survive death?" Hey, it doesn't hurt to ask, and you may like the answer, especially if you've already lost your special someone. Learning that it can all be made right can restore a saddened life to joy and hope.