



By Elder
Wilford W. Andersen
Of the Seventy



Receiving AND Retaining a Mighty Change

Those who exercise faith in Christ by obeying His commandments, repenting of their sins, earnestly entering into the covenant of baptism, and then renewing that covenant weekly will experience the purifying power of the Holy Ghost unto the remission of their sins. They will receive and retain a mighty change of heart.

We all desire that our sins be forgiven, but as we strive for righteousness, we also long for something more. We, like Nephi, long for a heart that “shake[s] at the appearance of sin” (2 Nephi 4:31) and that not only submits to God’s will but also desires His will. We long for a cleansing and sanctification of our hearts, which changes our desires.

Alma taught that God grants unto men according to their desires, whether they be good or evil (see Alma 29:4). Our hope, then, is not just to refrain from sinning but also to turn to the Lord, who has the power to grant a remission of our sins, to purify our desires, and to change our very natures (see Mosiah 5:2).

The Doctrine of Christ

The remission of our sins results from a process that is carefully defined in the scriptures and that is referred to as “the doctrine of Christ” (2 Nephi 31:21). This process begins when we develop *faith in Jesus Christ* (see Alma 34:16). Yielding our hearts to Christ leads us to *repentance* and a desire to enter into a covenant with Him to always remember Him, keep His commandments, and take His

name upon us (see Mosiah 4:1–3). As we make these promises at *baptism*, the Savior promises the baptism of fire—the gift of the *Holy Ghost*, which purifies and sanctifies us (see 2 Nephi 31:17; D&C 19:31).¹

When we yield our hearts to Christ—by conforming to the principles and ordinances of His gospel—He changes us. He also heals us and sanctifies us (see Helaman 3:35). As a result, “we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). This is the mighty change of heart experienced by the people of King Benjamin (see Mosiah 5:2) and by Alma the Younger (see Alma 5:12–14). This is the rebirth of which the Savior spoke to the Pharisee Nicodemus (see John 3:1–5). It occurs when we apply the doctrine of Christ. We are reborn into the family of Christ and thereby become His sons and His daughters (see Mosiah 5:7). This rebirth is the essence of His gospel, for it prepares us to return to the presence of the Father.

Missionaries are witnesses to this miraculous process. They watch it unfold in the lives of those they teach. Effective missionaries learn to carefully and patiently guide their investigators through each of the vital first principles and ordinances of the gospel, which constitute the doctrine of Christ.² The results are stunning, as “natural” and “fallen” men and women (see Mosiah 3:19; Alma 12:22) are transformed into faithful and noble sons and daughters of God filled with the joy of the gospel. In answer to Mormon’s question about whether miracles have ceased (see Moroni 7:27, 29), our missionaries can respond with a resounding “no!” They personally witness this greatest of miracles in the lives of their investigators.

There is an additional step, however, in the miraculous process of the remission of sins. Nephi taught that after we receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, we must *endure to the end*. When we exercise our faith unto repentance, are baptized, and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, the miracle begins. But the cleansing power and reassuring influence of the Holy Ghost will remain with us only if we “press forward with a steadfastness in Christ” (see 2 Nephi 31:19–20).

Alma understood this principle, asking his people, “And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?” (Alma 5:26).

If after baptism we commit sin and lose the Spirit’s influence, what are we to do? The Savior has provided the answer. He has given us the sacred ordinance of the sacrament.

Renewing Our Covenants

A mighty change of heart is not something we experience only once. Rather, it is a process we repeat over and over throughout our mortal lives, and thus our light grows “brighter and brighter until the perfect day” (D&C 50:24). We repeat the steps as taught in the doctrine of Christ by exercising our faith unto repentance. When we participate in the renewing ordinance of the sacrament, the power and influence of the Holy Ghost are renewed in our lives. Through the power of the Spirit, we are once again spiritually reborn and become the sons and daughters of Christ (see Mosiah 5:7). That is what is meant by our taking upon us the name of Christ (see Mosiah 5:8), which we must be willing to do each time we partake of the sacrament.

While serving as a mission president in Guadalajara, Mexico, I interviewed a missionary who expressed concern that he was not feeling the influence of the Spirit as he had earlier in his mission. I asked if he was getting along well with his companion, if he was obeying mission rules, and if he was keeping his thoughts and actions clean and pure. He responded that he was. I was then impressed to ask him if he was partaking of the sacrament each week. Surprisingly, he answered no. He and his companion were trying so hard to bring their investigators to church that they usually arrived late and missed the ordinance of the sacrament. That was our answer. Without renewing his baptismal covenant, he was losing the promised blessing of having the Spirit with him.

In order to receive a remission of sins, it is necessary to take each step as taught in the doctrine of Christ.



When we participate in the renewing ordinance of the sacrament, the power and influence of the Holy Ghost are renewed in our lives.

Receiving the ordinance of baptism, therefore, requires that we first develop faith in the Savior and repent of our sins. Then we enter into the required baptismal covenant to keep the commandments and qualify for the promised blessing of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Likewise, to renew the blessing of the constant companionship of the Spirit promised in the sacrament prayers, we continue the ongoing process of developing and exercising faith in Christ, repenting of our sins, and partaking of the sacrament with a determination to keep the commandments.

Receiving sacred ordinances without accepting and keeping associated covenants is living a religion of appearances—“having a form of godliness; but denying the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:5; see also Joseph Smith—History 1:19). The power and the promised blessings are received only by keeping the covenants. Paul writes about the consequences of receiving the ordinance of the sacrament while ignoring the associated covenants:

“Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

“For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Corinthians 11:27–29).

If we thoughtlessly partake of the sacrament, we can lose the blessings of the Spirit, which we need in order to experience again a mighty change of heart and receive and retain a remission of sins.

These cautions give added meaning to the third commandment: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.” Neither should we take the name of the Lord *upon us* in vain, “for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh [upon him] his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7).

I am a witness of the miraculous process of spiritual rebirth. Those who exercise faith in Christ by obeying His commandments, repenting of their sins, earnestly entering into the covenant of baptism, and then renewing that covenant weekly will receive the purifying power of the Holy Ghost unto the remission of their sins. They will experience and retain a mighty change of heart and will “have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.”

May each of us strive to receive this great blessing. ■

NOTES

1. See Bible Dictionary, “Holy Ghost.”
2. See *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 1–11, 60–66.