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THE GATE CALLED BAPTISM

I pray that each of us may obtain a fuller understanding of our need for baptism, of the gateway it provides us to the lifelong process of conversion, and of the merciful atoning love of our Savior.

Glen (not his real name) had led a life marked by chaos and conflict. As a teen he had become involved in gangs, crime, and violence. When he met the missionaries, he felt that the things they believed were too good to be true. But in time he came to know that they were indeed true and that they were of greater worth than anything else he had ever known.

After putting his life in order, and with sincere repentance and gospel living, Glen entered the waters of baptism. He had found a new life filled with light and peace and joy. He was clean before the Lord.

Nephi said:

“Wherefore, do the things which I have told you I have seen that your Lord and your Redeemer should do; for, for this cause have they been shown unto me, that ye might know the gate by which ye should enter. For the gate by which ye should enter is repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost.

“And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate” (2 Nephi 31:17–18).

These verses clearly teach that baptism, a holy sign of a covenant between God and His children, is required

for our salvation (see also Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 2 Nephi 9:23–24). Indeed, so important and indispensable is this ordinance that Jesus Himself was baptized “to fulfil all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15).

It is difficult to misunderstand Nephi’s explanation of this point: “And now, if the Lamb of God, he being holy, should have need to be baptized by water, to fulfil all righteousness, O then, how much more need have we, being unholy, to be baptized, yea, even by water!” (2 Nephi 31:5).

When we are baptized, we witness to the Father that we are willing to enter into a covenant “to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light;

“Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life” (Mosiah 18:8–9).

We renew this covenant every Sunday as we partake of the sacrament. The words of the covenant, as stated in the sacrament prayers, invite Heavenly Father’s children to witness “that they are willing to take upon them the name



of [his] Son, and always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them; that they may always have his Spirit to be with them” (D&C 20:77).

An Introductory Ordinance

Besides witnessing our willingness to obey God, baptism allows us to enter into the kingdom of God, which is the Church of Jesus Christ on earth. The Guide to the Scriptures tells us, “Baptism by immersion in water by one having authority is the introductory ordinance of the gospel and is necessary to become a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”¹

The Savior clearly defined the purpose of baptism when he told Nicodemus, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

Authorized baptism is required for us to dwell in the presence of the Father and the Son, but I rejoice that baptism has another fundamental purpose. Baptism is not just the gate through which we enter the Lord’s Church and subsequently the celestial kingdom; it is also the gateway to the precious, indispensable, and ongoing process of becoming “perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:32, 33) that each of us needs and wants. This process, as described in the fourth article of faith, begins with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, followed by repentance, then “baptism by immersion for the remission of sins,” and subsequently the reception of the Holy Ghost.

In simple terms, we may call this ongoing process *conversion*. Jesus referred to it in His

initial comment to Nicodemus. As the Master Teacher, He addressed Nicodemus’s underlying question about what he must do to be saved, saying, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

Being born again requires more than baptism, explained Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

“The spiritual rebirth described in [the scriptures] typically does not occur quickly or all at once; it is an ongoing process—not a single event. . . .

“We *begin* the process of being born again through exercising faith in Christ, repenting of our sins, and being baptized by immersion for the remission of sins by one having priesthood authority.” But other “essential steps in the process of being born again” include “total immersion in and saturation with the Savior’s gospel.”²

Being “born again” is another name for conversion. It is having “a broken heart and a contrite spirit,” which the Savior described as the only offering He will accept (see 3 Nephi 9:19–20). Surely, none of us will be able to “see” the kingdom of God until we have “experienced this mighty change in [our] hearts” (Alma 5:14; see also Mosiah 5:2; Alma 5:26).

This process, which leads to a remission of our sins, begins with faith sufficient to repent and to be baptized. Mormon explained this point when he taught, “And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins” (Moroni 8:25).

Like many members of the Church, I did not have the dramatic conversion experience that Glen and others have had. I was “born of goodly parents” (1 Nephi 1:1; see also Enos 1:1) and was baptized at age eight. How can such a person experience the same conversion as those who join the Church at a later age?

A Gate to Lasting Conversion

This is one of the most wonderful things that each of us can come to understand about the gate called baptism. Baptism is not the destination, not even when accompanied by the essential element of the gift of the Holy Ghost. Baptism is the gate to the ongoing, life-long process of true and enduring conversion.

As with any new member, the process begins with a sincere desire in faith to do the will of the Father by being baptized. It continues with a searching inventory of all our past sins and an unreserved effort to cease them, confess them, make restitution where possible, and never return to them. After baptism, we receive the right to the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, contingent upon our always remembering the Savior in all we think, do, and are. And thus we are made clean (see 2 Nephi 31:17).

But what if we commit another sin after being baptized? Is all lost? Mercifully, our Father has made provision for our human frailties. We can once again pursue the process of faith and hope in Christ and sincere repentance. But this time and in subsequent times, the ordinance of baptism is not necessary, as a rule. The Lord has instead provided the ordinance of the sacrament. It gives us the

weekly opportunity to examine ourselves (see 1 Corinthians 11:28) and to symbolically place our sins on the Lord’s altar as we sincerely repent, again seek His forgiveness, and then go forward in a newness of life.

This is the process King Benjamin spoke of when he talked about “[putting] off the natural man and [becoming] a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). It is the unburdening and literally the exalting process to which Paul referred when he spoke of being “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. . . .

“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Romans 6:4, 6).

This is the ongoing and cumulative process that allows us to rejoice with the angels in the mercy and merits of Christ (see Alma 5:26). It includes the spiritual growth available as we receive the ordinances and keep the associated covenants offered in priesthood ordinations and in the temple.

I pray that each of us may obtain a fuller understanding of our need for baptism, of the gateway it provides us to the lifelong process of conversion, and of the merciful atoning love of our Savior, who stands “at the door” (Revelation 3:20) and bids us enter and dwell with Him and the Father forever. ■

NOTES

1. Guide to the Scriptures, “Baptism, Baptize,” scriptures.lds.org.
2. David A. Bednar, “Ye Must Be Born Again,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 21; emphasis added.

