

Divine Covenants

MAKE STRONG CHRISTIANS

What is it about making and keeping covenants with God that gives us power?



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On August 15, 2007, Peru suffered a massive earthquake that all but destroyed the coastal cities of Pisco and Chincha. Like many other Church leaders and members, Wenceslao Conde, the president of the Balconcito Branch of the Church in Chincha, immediately set about helping others whose homes were damaged.

Four days after the earthquake, Elder Marcus B. Nash of the Seventy was in Chincha helping to coordinate the Church's relief efforts there and met President Conde. As they talked about the destruction that had occurred and what was being done to help the victims, President Conde's wife, Pamela, approached, carrying one of her small children. Elder Nash asked Sister Conde how her children were. With a smile, she replied that through the goodness of God they were all safe and well. He asked about the Condes' home.

"It's gone," she said simply.

"What about your belongings?" he inquired.

"Everything was buried in the rubble

of our home," Sister Conde replied.

"And yet," Elder Nash noted, "you are smiling as we talk."

"Yes," she said, "I have prayed and I am at peace. We have all we need. We have each other, we have our children, we are sealed in the temple, we have this marvelous Church, and we have the Lord. We can build again with the Lord's help."

The Power of Covenants

What is the source of such moral and spiritual power, and how do we obtain it? The source is God. Our access to that power is through our covenants with Him. A covenant is an agreement between God and man, an accord whose terms are set by God.¹ In these divine agreements, God binds Himself to sustain, sanctify, and exalt us in return for our commitment to serve Him and keep His commandments.

What is it about making and keeping covenants with God that gives us the power to smile through hardships, to convert tribulation into triumph, to "be anxiously

engaged in a good cause, . . . and bring to pass much righteousness” (D&C 58:27)?

Strengthened by Gifts and Blessings

First, as we walk in obedience to the principles and commandments of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we enjoy a continual flow of blessings promised by God in His covenant with us. Those blessings provide the resources we need to act rather than simply be acted upon as we go through life. For example, the Lord’s commandments in the Word of Wisdom regarding the care of our physical bodies bless us first and foremost with “wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures” (D&C 89:19). Furthermore, they lead to a generally more healthy life and freedom from destructive addictions. Obedience

gives us greater control over our lives, greater capacity to come and go, to work and create. Of course, age, accident, and illnesses inevitably take their toll, but even so, our obedience to this gospel law enhances our capacity to deal with these challenges.

In the covenant path we find a steady supply of gifts and help. “Charity never faileth” (1 Corinthians 13:8; Moroni 7:46), love begets love, compassion begets compassion, virtue begets virtue, commitment begets loyalty, and service begets joy. We are part of a covenant people, a community of Saints who encourage, sustain, and minister to one another. As Nephi explained, “And if it so be that the children of men keep the commandments of God he doth nourish them, and strengthen them” (1 Nephi 17:3).

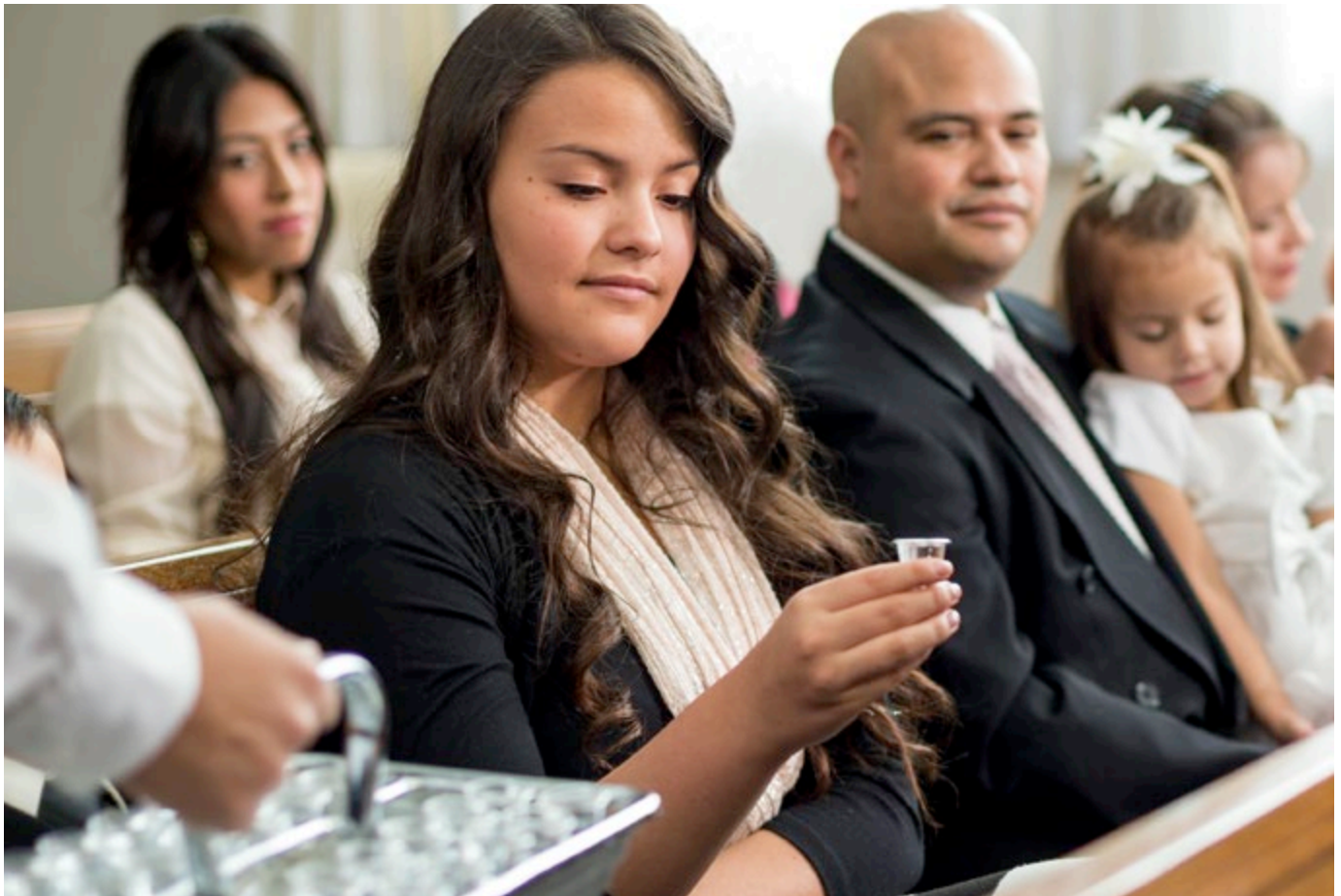


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Strengthened with Increased Faith

This brings us to a second way in which our covenants supply strength—they produce the faith necessary to persevere and to do all things that are expedient in the Lord. Our willingness to take upon us the name of Christ and keep His commandments requires a degree of faith, but as we honor our covenants, that faith expands. In the first place, the promised fruits of obedience become evident, which confirms our faith. Secondly, the Spirit communicates God’s pleasure, and we feel secure in His continued blessing and help. Thirdly, come what may, we can face life with hope and equanimity, knowing that we will succeed in the end because we have God’s promise to us individually, by name, and we know He cannot lie (see Enos 1:6; Ether 3:12).

Early Church leaders in this dispensation confirmed that adhering to the covenant path provides the reassurance we need in times of trial: “It was [the knowledge that their course in life conformed to the will of God] that enabled the ancient saints to endure all their afflictions and persecutions, and to take . . . not only the spoiling of their goods, and the wasting of their substance, joyfully, but also to suffer death in its most horrid forms; knowing (not merely believing) that when this earthly house of their tabernacle was dissolved, they had a building of God, a[n] house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Cor. 5:1).”²

They further pointed out that in offering whatever sacrifice God may require of us, we obtain the witness of the Spirit that our course is right and pleasing to God.³ With that knowledge, our faith becomes unbounded, having the assurance that God will in due time turn every affliction to our gain. (See D&C 97:8–9.)

Strengthened through the “Power of Godliness”

We have considered, first, the empowering blessings and, second, the endowment of faith that God grants to those who keep their covenants with Him. A final aspect of strength through covenants that I will mention is the bestowal of divine power. Our covenant commitment to Him permits our Heavenly Father to let His divine influence, “the power of godliness” (D&C 84:20), flow into our lives. He can do that because by our participation in priesthood ordinances, we exercise our agency and elect to receive it. Our participation in those ordinances also demonstrates that we are prepared to accept the additional responsibility that comes with added light and spiritual power.

In all the ordinances, especially those of the temple, we are endowed with power from on high (see D&C 109:22). This “power of godliness” comes in the person and by the influence of the Holy Ghost. The gift of the Holy Ghost is part of the new and everlasting covenant. It is an essential part of our baptism, the baptism of the Spirit. It is the messenger of grace by which the blood of Christ is applied to take away our sins and sanctify us (see 2 Nephi 31:17). It is the gift by which Adam was “quickened in the inner man”

(Moses 6:65). It was by the Holy Ghost that the ancient Apostles endured all that they endured and by their priesthood keys carried the gospel to the known world of their day.

When we have entered into divine covenants, the Holy Ghost is our comforter, our guide, and our companion. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are “the peaceable things of immortal glory; the truth of all things; that which quickeneth all things, which maketh alive all things; that which knoweth all things, and hath all power according to wisdom, mercy, truth, justice, and judgment” (Moses 6:61). The gifts of the Holy Spirit are testimony, faith,





knowledge, wisdom, revelations, miracles, healing, and charity, to name but a few (see D&C 46:13–26).

It is the Holy Ghost who bears witness of your words when you teach and testify. It is the Holy Ghost who, as you speak in hostile venues, puts into your heart what you should say and fulfills the Lord’s promise that “you shall not be confounded before men” (D&C 100:5). It is the Holy Ghost who reveals how you may clear the next seemingly insurmountable hurdle. It is by the Holy Ghost in you that others may feel the pure love of Christ and receive strength to press forward. It is also the Holy Ghost, in His character as the Holy Spirit of Promise, that confirms the validity and efficacy of your covenants and seals God’s promises upon you (see D&C 88:4–5; 109:14–15).

Heavenly Father Will Be with You

Divine covenants make strong Christians. I urge each one to qualify for and receive all the priesthood ordinances you can and then faithfully keep the promises you have made by covenant. In times of distress, let your covenants be paramount and let your obedience be exact. Then you can ask in faith, nothing wavering, according to your need, and God will answer. He will sustain you as you work and watch. In His own time and way He will stretch forth His hand to you, saying, “Here am I.” **NE**

From the April 2009 general conference address “The Power of Covenants.”

NOTES

1. See Guide to the Scriptures, “Covenant”; scriptures.lds.org.
2. *Lectures on Faith* (1985), 67.
3. See *Lectures on Faith*, 69–71.