

Baptism Unto The Remission of Sins

Recently a councilor in my bishopric spoke in Fast and testimony Meeting of the baptism of his eight-year-old daughter the day before, and how excited he was to explain to her, in Family Home Evening the past week, how in just a few days her spirit was going to be washed and cleansed from her sins in the waters of baptism. I have seen many bishops put their arm around an eight-year-old child after baptism and present them to the ward as the “cleanest” member of the congregation. I have heard talks given at Stake baptisms about the cleansing that will take place as sins are going to be “washed” away in the waters of the baptismal ordinance. And we sing primary songs about baptism with words and phrases like:

1. I like to look for rainbows whenever there is rain
And ponder on the beauty of an earth made clean
again.
2. I know when I am baptized my wrongs are washed
away,
And I can be forgiven and improve myself each day.

(Children’s Songbook P. 103)

These experiences, as nice and comforting as they might be, begs one to ask the proverbial question: What’s wrong with this picture? These statements, and teachings about baptism are not harmonious with the doctrines and teachings of scriptures nor are they congruent with the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Who Needs Baptism?

Every adult that ever lived? Perhaps the question should be : Who doesn’t need baptism? Those who have been kept from or are incapable of understanding the plan of Salvation, and the Gospel in such a way, that they could be held accountable for their actions and knowledge. The scriptures speak of one specific group that does not need the ordinance of baptism, and of another that can’t be held responsible for the breaking of Gospel law. These two groups are; small children and uninformed adults respectively.

Adam, the first man, and his wife Eve, began to have children after the Lord “had driven them out” (Moses 5:1) from the Garden of Eden.

2 And Adam knew his wife, and she bare unto him sons and daughters, and they began to multiply and to replenish the earth

3 And from that time forth, the sons and daughters of

Adam began to divide two and two in the land, and to till the land, and to tend flocks, and they also begat sons and daughters. (Moses 5:2-3)

Now that Adam and Eve had children and their children had children, the first parents receive commandments to “worship the Lord their God” and should offer sacrifice as an offering to the Lord, and the first parents were “obedient unto the commandments of the Lord” (Moses 5:5) without knowing anything about the Gospel plan of salvation. After “many days” (about three generations) Adam’s obedience, and his continued quest for light and truth from messengers from the presence of God, and his obedience is rewarded. The angel appears and begins teaching them about Christ and the atonement, as he questions Adam and Eve “why dost thou offer sacrifices” The first patriarch responds that “I know not, save the Lord commanded me” (Moses 5:6). Adam stated, that he knew nothing of the plan of salvation in his obedience, as what he had been seeking is about to be revealed. It may have been understood that that ‘if’ they partake of the fruit ‘then’ a Savior would be provided.

7 And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth.

8 Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name

of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore. (Moses 5:7-8)

These statements of the angel(s) that appear above; begin the introduction of the Gospel into the world for the first time. Verse Nine of this chapter records that in that day the “holy Ghost fell upon Adam” as the Gospel is explained to him in the first person of Christ.

9 And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and forever, that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will. (Moses 5:9)

This verse above is a synopsis of the instruction that Adam and Eve received as the Gospel was introduced to them. However, Enoch begins teaching about the Gospel as he begins his missionary labors among the people, and begins to quote from the Book of Adam, (Moses 6:5, 6) providing the detail that is missing between Verses Eight and Nine of Chapter Five. The detail begins in Moses 6:51, as Enoch begins teaching from Adam/s record by beginning: “and he (God) called upon our father Adam by his own voice, saying:” and the quote then begins in this verse and continues through the end of the chapter which is seventeen verses later in Moses 6: 68.

The first instructions from the Lord are the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel:

52 And he also said unto him: If thou wilt turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, which is Jesus Christ, the only name which shall be given under heaven, whereby salvation shall come unto the children of men, ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, asking all things in his name, and whatsoever ye shall ask, it shall be given you.

Adam then questions the Lord: “Why is it that men must repent and be baptized in water?” (Vs. 53). With the question of Adam the Lord establishes the foundation of the doctrinal concepts of: Justice, Mercy and Grace. As the Lord explains that the effects of the fall (spiritual and physical deaths) are forgiven and restored.

53 . . . And the Lord said unto Adam: Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden.

54 Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of

the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world.

Continuing the explanation that answers the first question of Adam, the Lord explains (at the end of verse 54) that when a person comes into the world they are whole, perfect, and without sin. He (the Lord) will continue below explaining that sin or the uncleanliness is a result of choice (as is salvation) and cannot be blamed on Satan, or the old adage once invoked: “the devil made me do it.”

55 And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good.

56 And it is given unto them to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves, and I have given unto you another law and commandment.

At the end of Verse Fifty-six, the Lord introduces another commandment, which begins the next verse and is stressed again in Verse Fifty-eight.

57 Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence; for, in the language of

Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge, who shall come in the meridian of time. 58 Therefore I give unto you a commandment, to teach these things freely unto your children, saying: (Moses 6:52-58)

This commandment given to the first father is the same commandment given to the parents of our dispensation in D&C 68:25-28. The implication is that parents teach children to understand assuming that the parents understand the principles and doctrines also.

25 And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.

26 For this shall be a law unto the inhabitants of Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized.

27 And their children shall be baptized for the remission of their sins when eight years old, and receive the laying on of the hands.

28 And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord. D&C 68:25-28

The Lord continues with the need for; faith, repentance, and baptism and the Gift of the Holy Ghost, as he talks about the fall and death, and the necessity of being spiritually cleansed to return to the presence of God, as Adam had experienced before. The Lord concludes this instruction by His declaration that “This is the plan of salvation” to all, through Christ.

59 That by reason of transgression cometh the fall, which fall bringeth death, and inasmuch as ye were born into the world by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and so became of dust a living soul, even so ye must be born again into the kingdom of heaven, of water, and of the Spirit, and be cleansed by blood, even the blood of mine Only Begotten; that ye might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory;

60 For by the water ye keep the commandment; by the Spirit ye are justified, and by the blood ye are sanctified;

61 Therefore it is given to abide in you; the record of heaven; the Comforter; 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.

62 And now, behold, I say unto you: This is the plan of salvation unto all men, through the blood of mine Only Begotten, who shall come in the meridian of time.
(Moses 6:59-62)

Following this instruction from the Lord, Adam was caught away and baptized by the spirit. It was declared to him, by a voice from heaven that he was not only baptized by water but by also fire and the Holy Ghost.

63 And behold, all things have their likeness, and all things are created and made to bear record of me, both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath: all things bear record of me.

64 And it came to pass, when the Lord had spoken with Adam, our father, that Adam cried unto the Lord, and he was caught away by the Spirit of the Lord, and was carried down into the water, and was laid under the water, and was brought forth out of the water.

65 And thus he was baptized, and the Spirit of God descended upon him, and thus he was born of the Spirit,

and became quickened in the inner man.

66 And he heard a voice out of heaven, saying: Thou art baptized with fire, and with the Holy Ghost. This is the record of the Father, and the Son, from henceforth and forever;

67 And thou art after the order of him who was without beginning of days or end of years, from all eternity to all eternity.

68 Behold, thou art one in me, a son of God; and thus may all become my sons. Amen. (Moses 6:59-68)

These last few verses quoted above, are those that leads back to Chapter Five of Moses, when it is described: “And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam” (Moses 5:9). Following Adam’s understanding of the Gospel, both he and his wife Eve, declare that had they not transgressed and fallen they never would have received the Gospel plan of salvation and the joy of their redemption.

10 And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God.

11 And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never

should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient. (Moses 5:10-11)

Adam and Eve now are obedient to the commandment they received in Chapter Six, Verses Fifty-seven and Fifty-eight, to teach the Gospel to their children. Remembering, that there were three generations on the earth when Adam and Eve receive and understanding of the plan of salvation, they begin to teach their posterity. “And Adam and Eve blessed the name of God, and they made all things known unto their sons and their daughters” (Moses 5:12).

Now that the true Gospel was on the earth, Satan could introduce his counterfeit plan of happiness in this new world. The record explains that he (Satan) has great success among all the posterity of Adam, except for Adam and Eve themselves.

13 And Satan came among them, saying: I am also a son of God; and he commanded them, saying: Believe it not; and they believed it not, and they loved Satan more than God. And men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual, and devilish. (Moses 5:13)

There exists an interesting yet underlying concept here that must be mentioned for the purpose of the original topic of this paper and

that is that, once Adam's posterity received the Gospel and then rejected it, 'loving Satan more than God' it was "men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual, and devilish." This is teaching that before there was the Gospel and gospel law (that was understood) there was no sin that resulted in a spiritually condemning nature and judgement. The Doctrine and Covenants provides some added insight to this concept by speaking about death, knowledge and the ability to sin by choice, unto the need of repentance. Verse Forty-two below, supports the concept presented in Moses, that Adam had posterity on the earth before they received the Gospel.

42 But, behold, I say unto you that I, the Lord God, gave unto Adam and unto his seed, that they should not die as to the temporal death, until I, the Lord God, should send forth angels to declare unto them repentance and redemption, through faith on the name of mine Only Begotten Son. (D&C 29:42)

Back to the task at hand: Who needs, or doesn't need baptism? These few verses in Section Twenty-nine begin to provide the answers to these questions.

46 But behold, I say unto you, that little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten;

47 Wherefore, they cannot sin, for power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable before me;

48 For it is given unto them even as I will, according to mine own pleasure, that great things may be required at the hand of their fathers.

49 And, again, I say unto you, that whoso having knowledge, have I not commanded to repent?

50 And he that hath no understanding, it remaineth in me to do according as it is written. And now I declare no more unto you at this time. Amen. (D&C 29:46-50)

“Little” children are redeemed from the foundation of the world and they “cannot sin” until they begin to become “accountable” which can only come by understanding. Hence, the commandment in D&C 68, for parents to teach their children to “understand” the Gospel of faith, repentance, baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the age of accountability, the sin of the child, (because of lack of knowledge) will be upon the heads of the parents.

25 And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of

the parents.

26 For this shall be a law unto the inhabitants of Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized. (D&C 68:25-26)

The Book of Mormon addresses the innocence of little children and the reason there is no need for baptism for those who are not accountable to gospel law. The Prophet Mormon instructs:

8 Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God. Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them . . .

10 Behold I say unto you that this thing shall ye teach—repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin. . .

11 And their little children need no repentance, neither baptism. Behold, baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins.

12 But little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world. . .

19 Little children cannot repent; wherefore, it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of God unto them, for they are all alive in him because of his mercy. (Moroni 8:8,10-12)

Little children cannot repent, because they do not have the knowledge, and agency to make choices, to be or not to be obedient to gospel law. There are pre-requisite conditions that must be present in order for one to be held accountable. When Adam was introduced into the Garden of Eden, there were specific conditions that were present that facilitated his transgression.

16 And I, the Lord God, commanded the man, saying:
Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat,
17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Moses 3:15-17)

The first requirement is to be a a position of responsibility and the ability (age) or freedom to act in the environment in which one is placed.

1. The underlying assumption is that one is capable of having the intellect to understand and retain knowledge.

2. There is a command that includes choices: “the Lord God commanded the man”
3. Second, There must be a choice: “of every tree. . . thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shall not eat of it”
4. The power to choose: “Thou mayest choose for thyself for it is given unto thee”
5. The law: “remember that I forbid it”
6. The consequence: “in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”

These few verses explain what is necessary for one to be held accountable to any law as well as gospel law, as the previous verses from Mormon Chapter Eight explained. Alma explains the law of accountability in a poetical way: “Now, how could a man repent except he should sin? How could he sin if there was no law? How could there be a law save there was a punishment?” (Alma 42:17).

As Mormon continues he moves the discussion from little children to adults who are without the knowledge of the law. To those who have no law, are under no condemnation.

22 For behold that all little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that are without the law. For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under

no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing—

24 ...for repentance is unto them that are under condemnation and under the curse of a broken law.
(Mormon 8:22, 24)

For those who are not “little children,” but adults when they learn gospel law (as was Adam’s posterity) Mormon explains that “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 8:22-25).

Jacob, the brother of Nephi explains this doctrine of accountability in these words after explaining the necessity of ‘faith,’ ‘repentance’ and the ‘ordinance of baptism.’

23 And he commandeth all men that they must repent, and be baptized in his name, having perfect faith in the Holy One of Israel, or they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God.

24 And if they will not repent and believe in his name, and be baptized in his name, and endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it.

25 Wherefore, he has given a law; and where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no

punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him.

26 For the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel.

27 But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state! (2 Nephi 9:23-27)

The eight year old child of record, when baptized has no sin that need be repented of or can be washed away. Nor do those who know no law. What then, is the ordinance of baptism for?

The First Principles and Ordinances

A year before the organization of the church, and while working on the translation of the Book of Mormon, the Prophet Joseph Smith and his scribe Oliver Cowdery came across references in the translation about baptism for the remission of sins. In May of 1829, pondering about this ordinance of baptism Joseph and Oliver

“went into the woods to inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins”. The young prophet records:

While we were thus employed, praying and calling upon the Lord a Messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us saying: Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the Gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth, until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness.¹

The messenger that ordained Joseph and Oliver declared himself to be John, the same that baptized the Savior and called John the Baptist in the New Testament. The heavenly messenger taught Joseph and Oliver about baptism, and instructed them that they were to baptize each other now that they had received the authority to do so. The restoration of this Aaronic Priesthood and the ordinance of baptism at this early date would indicate that ‘baptism for the remission of sins’ is one of the first and most important ordinances of which we are able to participate.

¹ History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 7 vols. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932-1951], 1: 39. Hereafter HC.

In 1842 The Prophet Joseph Smith responded to a request of John Wentworth the editor and owner of the Chicago Democrat, about the rise, progress and faith of the Latter-day Saints. From this famous letter that Joseph Smith prepares for publication, we received the “Articles of Faith” that we learn as children. The Articles of Faith outline some of the most important beliefs that set Latter-day Saints apart from the rest of Christianity. Joseph Smith declares in the Fourth Article of Faith the “first principles and ordinances” of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.²

These “First Principles and Ordinances” are described in the Book of Mormon as the “gospel” or “doctrine” of Christ. Understanding the ‘gospel’ correctly is so important that when Christ appears to the Nephites in the Book of Mormon, He begins and ends his ministry with a discussion of the gospel of Jesus Christ. These teachings are found in 3 Nephi 11:31-40 , and in 3 Nephi 27:10-21 . In 3 Nephi chapter eleven; the Lord himself teaches, what He calls “my doctrine” or gospel (See also Jacob 7:6). This gospel is described as; faith, repentance, baptism and the Holy Ghost, and

² *Ibid*, 4: 541.

then Christ states: “whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock;” (3 Nephi 11:40).³

In the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord has revealed that the teaching of these ‘first principles and ordinances of the gospel’ to children is a primary obligation of parents. This imperative directed to the parents in Zion implies the importance of learning these gospel elements. The Lord declares:

And again, inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents. (Doctrine and Covenants 68:25.)

The injunction from the Lord, is not just to teach but to ‘teach to understand’ the doctrines of faith, repentance, baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. The ‘understanding’ of these doctrines, principles and ordinances are to be taught by “eight years” of age, the age of accountability and the age of baptism unto the remission of sin.

³ See also 3 Nephi 27:13-21; 3 Nephi 11:31-41; D.&C. 39:5-6; D.&C. 33:11-13; cf. Jacob 7:6

Countless teachers in the Church, have taught this Fourth Article of Faith along with the many other scriptures about baptism “unto”, or “for” the remission of sins believing that it is the ‘waters’ of baptism that washes or cleanses from sin. In an abstract way this is true, but the words “unto” and “for” implies a deeper meaning and more important concept. These words indicate that baptism is a door, a way, or path that leads to this remission of sin, and not the actual cleansing. The phrase “baptism unto the remission of sins” then could not be more correct. However it does not say that baptism remits the sins, nor cleanses us from our sins, but it is a baptism “for” or “unto” the remission of sins. Often in the New Testament the phrase appears as the “baptism of repentance”. Repentance is the attitude and process of changing our life and character for the better. This desire to be and do better lends itself to the very meaning of the word “repent”, which if we have been taught to understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ will lead us to a commitment to Christ and a desire to enter into the waters of baptism. Thus, this commitment to come unto Christ is manifested in a “baptism of (or ‘because of’) repentance” which can lead to the eventual and actual remission of sins.

To lay the foundation for a better understanding of this important ordinance, we begin with a few statements from the Prophet Joseph Smith about baptism. This review should open and enlighten the mind to a better understanding of baptism, that is often obscured from view by the curtains of tradition.

The Prophet Joseph states, “the gospel requires baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, which is the meaning of the word in the original language—namely, to bury or immerse.”⁴ The meaning in the original language of the word baptism as a “burial” is a hint for the necessity of a ‘complete’ immersion, as described by the Lord through Paul and the Prophet Joseph. He continues teaching that “Baptism is a holy ordinance preparatory to the reception of the Holy Ghost; it is the channel and key by which the Holy Ghost will be administered.”⁵ This baptism or burial in water is required before the gift of the Holy Ghost can be given to an individual and the only “channel and key” for the reception of this third member of the Godhead. Joseph continues teaching that baptism for the remission of sins is a prerequisite to the reception of the Holy Ghost in these words: “There are two Comforters spoken of. One is the Holy Ghost, the same as given on the day of Pentecost, and that all Saints receive after faith, repentance, and baptism.”⁶ He continues, “You might as well baptize a bag of sand as a man, if not done in view of the remission of sins and getting of the Holy Ghost. Baptism by water is but half a baptism, and is good for nothing without the other half—that is, the baptism of the Holy Ghost.”⁷

4 *TPJS*, p. 314.

5 *Ibid*, p. 148.

6 *Ibid*, p. 149.

7 *Ibid*, p. 314

Joseph Smith also taught that Baptism is an ordinance that is required to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. In the New Testament there are three prepositions used in conjunction with the Holy Ghost: “on you” and “with you” and “in you”. The Prophet Joseph discusses some of the differences between these prepositions, as he states: “There is a difference between the Holy Ghost and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Cornelius received the Holy Ghost before he was baptized, which was the convincing power of God unto him of the truth of the Gospel, but he could not receive the gift of the Holy Ghost until after he was baptized.”⁸

The Holy Ghost came “on” Cornelius at Caesarea giving him inspiration or spiritual direction without being baptized. The Holy Ghost can be “with” someone as a comforter in times of trial or suffering, to be a needed companion “with” you. The “Gift of the Holy Ghost can only be given by one holding the proper keys and authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and may only be given after Baptism as the Prophet Joseph stated. This third member of the Godhead is bestowed upon a person as the “Gift of the Holy Ghost” that he might dwell “in” an individual to begin the process of cleansing and purification. After baptism, this gift then entitles the worthy person to have a fullness of the blessing of the Holy Ghost to be “on, in” and “with” them as a constant companion.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 199.

The Lord declares that the Holy Ghost is a “personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us. A man may receive the Holy Ghost, and may descend upon him and not tarry with him” (Doctrine and Covenants 130:22, 23).

Baptism is a prerequisite for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and in the words of Joseph Smith, ‘baptism by water without the view of a remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost is but a half a baptism’. The reason why baptism by “burial” or immersion must precede the gift of the Holy Ghost will be seen as the meaning and symbol of this important ordinance is reviewed.

Baptism as a Sign

Joseph Smith teaching on the subject of baptism declared this ordinance as a “sign” or covenant (not a cleansing) that the participant gives, of a willingness to be obedient to the commandments of God.

Upon the same principle do I contend that baptism is a sign ordained of God, for the believer in Christ to take upon himself in order to enter into the kingdom of God, "for except ye are born of water and of the Spirit ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of God," said the Savior. It is a sign and a commandment which God has set for man to enter into His kingdom.

Baptism is a sign to God, to angels, and to heaven that we do the will of God, and there is no other way beneath the heavens whereby God hath ordained for man to come to Him to be saved, and enter into the Kingdom of God, except faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins, and any other course is in vain; then you have the promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost.⁹

The Prophet Joseph declared that baptism is a “sign” of obedience. The “sign” of baptism is a “sign to God, to angels, and to heaven that we do the will of God”. It is a covenant of obedience, and a prerequisite to cleansing. Traditions taught by many teachers, and the element of water itself imply that baptism might be a washing. Outside of using water for drinking, the most familiar use of this liquid is that of cleansing. Hence, our first thoughts of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins would naturally, but not scripturally, be one of washing or cleansing by the water. Yet, the prophet is clear that baptism is meant to be a sign of obedience and an ordinance that precedes the gift of the Holy Ghost, rather than a cleansing or washing ordinance. Baptism, in the Doctrine and Covenants, cannot be administered or, “be received into the church of Christ unless one has arrived unto the years of accountability before God, and is capable of repentance. (Doctrine and Covenants 20:71.).

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 197.

Consider the familiar eight year old baptism. The scriptures teach, as do the modern day prophets that children under the age of eight cannot sin. The Lord declares: “. . . that little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten; Wherefore, they cannot sin, for power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable before me; (Doctrine and Covenants 29:46-47.) Children cannot sin before they reach the age of accountability, and this age we are taught, is eight years.¹⁰ A child therefore, cannot be baptized until the age of accountability, meaning that the baptism of the child of record cannot wash, nor does it cleanse them from any sin for they could not sin before baptism. Baptism exists then not as a cleansing or washing for sin, but an ordinance that will lead to the remission of sin later in life. Parents therefore, have the important responsibility of teaching their children to understand the gospel truths, principles, and ordinances, and to prepare them with this knowledge about baptism by the time they reach the age of accountability; otherwise, the sin is upon the heads of the parents. Taking the statements of Joseph Smith above, children should understand that they are making a covenant to do the will of God as they enter the waters of baptism and not to be cleansed of sins that they could not have committed.

¹⁰ Elder Delbert L. Stapley, Conference Report, October 1960, Sunday Morning; See also D.&C. 68:26-27.

The phrase in scripture about sin being “washed” is almost always used in reference to the washing or cleansing of sin that comes by the blood of the atonement as “our garments are washed white in the blood of the Lamb,”¹¹ and not the waters of baptism. This baptism, in scripture, represents a burial and a death of the “old man” and a coming forth or resurrection of a new person one that will be obedient to the will of God. To stress again the words of the Prophet Joseph Smith: “Baptism is a sign to God, to angels, and to heaven that we do the will of God.”¹²

Baptism as a Burial

The Lord himself defines the symbol of Baptism as inspired prophets recorded His words in scripture. In the Inspired Version or the JST we read not of the cleansing but the burial of baptism.

4 And God talked with him, saying, My people have gone astray from my precepts, and have not kept mine ordinances, which I gave unto their fathers;

5 And they have not observed mine anointing, and the burial, or baptism wherewith I commanded them; (JST Genesis 17:4-5)

10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power;

¹¹ See: Alma 5:21; Alma 13:11; Revelation 7:14; 3 Nephi 27:19; Ether 13:11.

¹² *TPJS* p. 197.

11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcison made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcison of Christ;

12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. (JST Colossians 2:10-12)

These passages teach that the actual symbol of baptism is a “burial” rather than a washing. The Lord echoes these words about the symbol baptism in the Doctrine and Covenants, explaining why baptismal fonts are below ground:

13 Consequently, the baptismal font was instituted as a similitude of the grave, and was commanded to be in a place underneath where the living are wont to assemble, to show forth the living and the dead, and that all things may have their likeness, and that they may accord one with another—that which is earthly conforming to that which is heavenly, as Paul hath declared, 1 Corinthians 15:46, 47, and 48: (Doctrine and Covenants 128:13)

The Apostle Paul continues with the concept of the baptism or burial of the old man, and the rising of the new man in Romans:

2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

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.

5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

6 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 6:2-6)

Paul makes it clear that baptism is considered a burial, and he coming forth from the water a resurrection of a new person “that henceforth we should not serve sin”. This apostle declares as does Joseph Smith stated that: “Baptism is a sign to God, to angels, and to heaven that we do the will of God.” This “newness of life” spoken of by Paul is the new and committed life of ‘obedience’ to the will of God preparatory to participating in the fullness of Gospel ordinances.

OBEDIENCE: The First Law, and First Covenant

Obedience is often stated to be “the first law of heaven” and there are scriptural reasons for this statement.¹³ To put it succinctly, we

13 McConkie, Bruce R., *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966], p. 539.

cannot be held accountable, or participate in any ordinance or blessing of the gospel until we enter into a covenant or ordinance of obedience. We cannot sin against gospel law if we haven't received the knowledge of the Gospel and then enter into a covenant to be obedient to those laws. Anciently it was the custom that when the Lord had a blessing to offer the masses he would require them to voice their acceptance of the law of obedience. Often this 'acclamation of obedience' was done in unison or "in one voice" by the masses being put under covenant to be obedient. Before the Lord gave to the Children of Israel the promised blessings of Abraham, (which by rejection, they then lost) he instructed Moses as to how to prepare them for their blessings to come.

5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

7 ¶ And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him.

8 And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned

the words of the people unto the LORD. (Exodus 19:5-8)

The Law of Obedience presented in verse 5, the blessing to be expected is seen in verse 6, the presentation to the people is found in verse 7 and the “acclamation” or declaration by the mass participants, in the affirmative in verse 8. All the people answered together that they would be willing to do as the Lord had spoken, thereby collectively, yet individually, entering into a covenant of obedience. This covenant of obedience must be invoked by the initiate before any blessing of the Gospel could be bestowed upon the people.

A similar event can be seen in the Old Testament, as Ezra is putting the people under covenant to be obedient to the command to rebuild the temple:

5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:

6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. (Nehemiah 8:5-6)

A similar acclamation is evident in the Book of Mormon as King Benjamin puts his people under a covenant of obedience in order

to receive the promised blessings that had been taught to them. The individual cannot be held accountable for laws and commandments that are unexplained or unlearned. Only after an explanation and understanding, coupled with a desire to conform to the stipulations, the first step toward the desired blessings is an ordinance or covenant of obedience. Agency is a key principle, and agency would demand that a person cannot be spiritually held accountable for something they have not agreed to do. Disobedience could not exist without a covenant of obedience entered into first. The commission of a sin would require knowledge of good and evil and a covenant by agency and without force, to be obedient to law.¹⁴

1 And now, it came to pass that when king Benjamin had thus spoken to his people, he sent among them, desiring to know of his people if they believed the words which he had spoken unto them.

2 And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us ...

5 And we are willing to enter into a covenant with our God to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments in all things that he shall command us, all the remainder of our days . . .

6 And now, these are the words which king Benjamin

¹⁴ See 2 Nephi 9:25-26; Alma 42:17-21.

desired of them; and therefore he said unto them: Ye have spoken the words that I desired; and the covenant which ye have made is a righteous covenant.

7 And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters. (Mosiah 5:1-7)

The people, taught by King Benjamin “cried with one voice, saying Yea, we believe” and “are willing to enter into a covenant . . . to do his will, and to be obedient to his commandments”. This acclamation led King Benjamin to explain that because of the covenant of obedience the people entered into (verse 7) they can now take upon them the name of Christ and be “called the children of Christ”

This covenant of obedience must precede any further ordinances or covenants, that one should participate in, that will yield gospel blessings. Obedience is the First Law of Heaven. Remembering in Moses Chapter 5:5 that “Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord” thereby preparing him for the further light and knowledge that he was seeking from the messengers sent from the presence of God. This obedience preceded the desired

blessing of further light and truth, and the revelation of the Gospel plan of salvation. Obedience precedes knowledge and consequently that knowledge demands obedience for further light and truth. It is the first law of heaven, and the first law and covenant we take upon ourselves before we can become a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. Baptism is the first covenant and ordinance of obedience we make as we desire to participate in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The door into the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God is that of obedience. The “sign” and ordinance of that covenant must be entered into prior to participating in the Gospel. We cannot be disobedient to gospel law, until we understand that law and covenant to be obedient to that law. The age of accountability, knowledge and baptism, all go hand in hand.

By prophetic utterance the Book of Mormon contains “the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ” and restores those “plain and precious truths” about faith, repentance baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost, that were omitted by design and lost. 2 Nephi teaches in an undeniable way the purpose of baptism. A revelatory view of baptism can be seen by viewing the scriptural text as Nephi records the meaning of the baptism of the Savior and thus, every individual. Contemplating the meaning behind the covenant made at baptism, should open an understanding and vision as to the meaning of these covenants that are renewed (entered into again) each week as we partake of the sacrament. Verses 6-10 are about baptism and verses 12-14 are about the Holy Ghost.

6 And now, I would ask of you, my beloved brethren, wherein the Lamb of God did fulfil all righteousness in being baptized by water?

7 Know ye not that he was holy? But notwithstanding he being holy, he showeth unto the children of men that, according to the flesh he humbleth himself before the Father, and witnesseth unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his commandments.

8 Wherefore, after he was baptized with water the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove.

9 And again, it showeth unto the children of men the straitness of the path, and the narrowness of the gate, by which they should enter, he having set the example before them.

10 And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, can we follow Jesus save we shall be willing to keep the commandments of the Father? (2 Nephi 31:6-10)

The words recorded by Nephi could not be more clear as to the purpose of the baptism of Christ. Verse 6 is asking why righteousness is fulfilled in baptism. Verse 7 teaches that righteousness is fulfilled because baptism is a covenant and ordinance that even the Savior must keep to witness “unto the Father that he would be obedient unto him in keeping his

commandments.” Verse 9 explains the reason and the way we follow Christ. And that way (verse 10) is by being “willing to keep the commandments of the Father” and declaring that willingness by the baptism of water. The doctrine about baptism as explained by the Savior, is expanded in the next few verses.

12 And also, the voice of the Son came unto me, saying: He that is baptized in my name, to him will the Father give the Holy Ghost, like unto me; wherefore, follow me, and do the things which ye have seen me do.

13 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism—yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels, and shout praises unto the Holy One of Israel.

14 But, behold, my beloved brethren, thus came the voice of the Son unto me, saying: After ye have repented of your sins, and witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water, and have received the baptism of fire and of the

Holy Ghost, and can speak with a new tongue, yea, even with the tongue of angels, and after this should deny me, it would have been better for you that ye had not known me. (2 Nephi 31:12-14)

These verses are to clear even for commentary. Baptism is required for the reception of the Holy Ghost (verse 12). The baptism follows the “repenting of your sins” (notice its repenting, not receiving a forgiveness) which baptism is witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism. Verse 13 emphasising that after baptism “then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost” and after the reception of the Holy Ghost there will come a baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost. Taking upon the name of Christ is a covenant of obedience. Verse 14 teaches again that after repentance, (not forgiveness) that this ordinance “witnessed unto the Father that ye are willing to keep my commandments, by the baptism of water”.

As the first Nephite church is about to be organized and the first baptism leading up to that organization, the Prophet Alma prepares the people for this ordinance in Mosiah 18. After Alma talks to Helam about the “Law of the Gospel” in verses 8-9 he speaks specifically about the sign of baptism.

10 Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the

Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you? (Mosiah 18:10)

There should be no misunderstanding after reading this verse as to the purpose of baptism, which agrees with the Lords words to Nephi and the statements of Joseph Smith. This verse declares that baptism is a “covenant” to “serve him and keep his commandments” and once entering into this covenant of obedience, the text states: “that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly”. This verse has the familiar sounds of the Sacrament prayer. A few verses further emphasis is added as the purpose of baptism is repeated and taught again by the Prophet Alma:

13 And when he had said these words, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he said: Helam, I baptize thee, having authority from the Almighty God, as a testimony that ye have entered into a covenant to serve him until you are dead as to the mortal body; and may the Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you; and may he grant unto you eternal life, through the redemption of Christ, whom he has prepared from the foundation of the world. (Mosiah 18:13)

Mosiah Twenty One teaches that as the people of Limhi accepted the gospel as taught by Ammon, they desired to be baptized as a “witness and testimony” and covenant of obedience:

35 They were desirous to be baptized as a witness and a testimony that they were willing to serve God with all their hearts; nevertheless they did prolong the time; and an account of their baptism shall be given hereafter. (Mosiah 21:35)

The words of Alma leave no room for doubt about the meaning of baptism in Mosiah 18. The covenant of baptism or obedience is to serve until death and ‘with all our hearts’ that the “Spirit of the Lord be poured out upon you”. The baptism of the Holy Ghost is to cleanse us after a covenant of obedience, and the exercising of faith unto repentance. Members of the Church have the privilege and opportunity of entering again into this covenant of obedience, each week, by partaking of the sacrament, rather than being baptized over and over again.

Alma the younger speaking to the people of Gideon commends them for their righteousness and invites them to enter into the waters of baptism. Teaching as did his father before him at the Waters of Mormon, the meaning of baptism as a covenant of obedience.

15 Yea, I say unto you come and fear not, and lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction, yea, come and go forth, and show unto your God that ye are willing to repent of your sins and enter into a covenant with him to keep his commandments, and witness it unto him this day by going into the waters of baptism. (Alma 7:15)

The “Encyclopedia of Mormonism” prepared and published under the direction of the Church Correlation Committee to be placed in the libraries and universities around the world, contain the doctrines of Mormonism. This great work filled a void with the correct information, doctrines and church history, for those seeking knowledge about the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Under the subject heading of “Baptismal Covenant” we learn that baptism is a sign of obedience, and covenant to serve God, and a cleansing by the Holy Ghost.

When a person enters into a Latter-day Saint baptism, he or she makes a covenant with God. Baptism is a "sign...that we will do the will of God, and there is no other way beneath the heavens whereby God hath ordained for man to come to Him to be saved" (TPJS, p. 198).

Candidates promise to "come into the fold of God, and to be called his people,...to bear one another's

burdens,...to mourn with those that mourn, and...to stand as witnesses of God...even until death" (Mosiah 18:8-9). A person must enter this covenant with the proper attitudes of humility, repentance, and determination to keep the Lord's commandments, and serve God to the end (2 Ne. 31:142 Ne. 31:6-17; Moro. 6:2-4; D&C 20:37). In turn, God promises remission of sins, redemption, and cleansing by the Holy Ghost (Acts 22:16; 3 Ne. 30:2). This covenant is made in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

The baptized can renew this covenant at each Sacrament meeting by partaking of the Sacrament. This continual willingness to remember Christ and to keep his commandments brings the Lord's promise of his Spirit and produces the "fruits" (Gal. 5:22) and "gifts" (D&C 46) that lead to eternal life.¹⁵

The "Encyclopedia of Mormonism" sheds further light on the subject under 'Baptism'.

Baptism symbolizes the covenant by which people promise to come into the fold of God, to take upon themselves the name of Christ, to stand as a witness for God, to keep his commandments, and to bear one

¹⁵ *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by, Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), vol. 1, p. 94.

another's burdens, manifesting a determination to serve him to the end, and to prepare to receive the spirit of Christ for the remission of sins. The Lord, as his part of the covenant, is to pour out his spirit upon them, redeem them from their sins, raise them in the first resurrection, and give them eternal life (Mosiah 18:7-10; D&C 20:37)¹⁶

Many scriptures have the phrase “take upon them the name of Christ” as part of the baptismal passages. The prophet Moroni explains this phrase as he writes about baptism and the Holy Ghost and the purpose of each ordinance in the life of the initiate by stating that “none were received unto baptism save they took upon them the name of Christ, having a determination to serve him to the end.” (Moroni 6:3)¹⁷

Taking upon oneself the “name of Christ” described by Moroni is “having a determination to serve him to the end”. Baptism, the symbol of the death and burial of the old person, portrays the laying down of the old and the coming forth of the new. Coming up and out of the waters in which we are buried, as from the grave of the ‘natural man.’ Reborn again into a new life, having entered

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 92.

¹⁷ Baptism as a covenant of obedience is seen in the re-baptism of many of the leaders of the Church as a commitment of obedience. This can be seen in: Matthias F. Cowley, Wilford Woodruff, His Life and Labors, comp. [Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1916], pp. 487 - 488. “On the 13th of July, in the evening, according to his journal, there was a priesthood meeting held in the old Tabernacle, where the subject of renewing covenants by baptism was discussed. The whole assembly voted to renew their covenants, and later the Presidency, the Twelve, the Seventies, and the Presiding Bishopric were baptized and entered into a special covenant to observe the rules of the United Order.”

into a covenant and ordinance of obedience becoming a new person, a new creature willing to go forth and live a higher law, and putting off the old man. By baptism, one becomes a “Christian” taking upon ourselves His Name, “having a determination to serve him to the end”. Having entered into the covenant and ordinance of obedience we are now ready to participate fully in the gospel of Jesus Christ, accountable to the covenant of obedience. Baptism did not cleanse us, or wash us as it is traditionally taught but is a preparatory covenant and ordinance leading “unto the remission of sins”. We are now ready for the process of cleansing which comes because of the Gift of the Holy Ghost. This “gift” can only be given after we ‘witness unto the Father, by baptism’ that we are willing to be obedient. (See also D&C 20:37). Moroni continues his record with the gift of the Holy Ghost and the purpose for which it is given.

4 And after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ; and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith. (Moroni 6:4)

After “they had been received unto baptism” the cleansing of sin, in the words of Moroni, is accomplished by the divine “power of the Holy Ghost”. Baptism is the door, the way, or the path, by which we can begin the cleansing process. It is the baptism unto the remission of sins. The baptism of water is an ordinance prerequisite to the baptism of the Holy Ghost or Spirit, and then the sanctification process of the baptism of the refiner’s fire. Looking back at 2 Nephi 31 the baptism unto the remission of sins is even clearer.

17 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.

18 And then are ye in this strait and narrow path which leads to eternal life; yea, ye have entered in by the gate; ye have done according to the commandments of the Father and the Son; and ye have received the Holy Ghost, which witnesses of the Father and the Son, unto the fulfilling of the promise which he hath made, that if ye entered in by the way ye should receive. (2 Nephi 31:17-18)

The scriptures make it obvious that baptism is a covenant of obedience that opens the door for the ordinance of the Gift of the Holy Ghost preparing the way for a remission of sin. It does not necessarily indicate in scripture that the complete remission of sins by the Holy Ghost will come instantly. (In some examples in scripture it does) True repentance is actually the process of changing our character. That character change is neither magical nor miraculous, but can only be accomplished by the exercise of agency. The only person, who truly understands the real power of temptation, is the person who resists it. Choosing righteousness in the presence of evil is character development which is the gospel of repentance. There is a preparation necessary for the remission or cleansing of sin. Part of this preparation is described by Amulek in Alma Thirty-four as exercising “faith unto repentance” in the infinite and eternal sacrifice of the son of God, and becoming worthy for the constant companionship of the Holy Ghost, and for the remission of sins that can come. At the end of verse eighteen of 2 Nephi, Chapter Thirty-one quoted above, it mentions at the end of “the promise He hath made, that if ye entered in by the way ye should receive”. This promise is a forgiveness of sins as the Lord teaches us that the cleansing or forgiveness that we receive is actually from the Father. Christ provided the sacrifice and can claim the “rights of mercy” from the Father to be an advocate, and mediator between God and mankind.

27 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased because Christ hath ascended into heaven, and hath sat down on the right hand of God, to claim of the Father his rights of mercy which he hath upon the children of men?

28 For he hath answered the ends of the law, and he claimeth all those who have faith in him; and they who have faith in him will cleave unto every good thing; wherefore he advocateth the cause of the children of men; and he dwelleth eternally in the heavens. (Moroni 7:27-28)

32 Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

33 And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32-33)

Conclusion

The ordinance of baptism is without question, “unto” or “for” the remission of sin. This remission of sin can only come by the “power of the Holy Ghost” and the power, or “Gift of the Holy Ghost” can only be confirmed to, and received by, those who have entered in to a covenant of obedience of baptism by immersion by one having authority. By participating in the symbolic burial we call baptism, and the coming forth from the total and symbolic burial of immersion as a new person, we witness unto the Father that we have “put off the natural man” through the ordinance and covenant of obedience. The baptized person having made the covenant to ‘serve God and keep his commandments’ is now prepared for the Gift of the Holy Ghost, to guide and inspire the initiate in their new commitment and covenant. Obedience is the first law of heaven and of earth, and the covenant of obedience is a prerequisite to participating in the Gospel and its blessings. Baptism is an ordinance prepared for those who have reached the age of accountability, the age of obedience. Baptism does not cleanse or wash sin away, as traditionally thought and taught. Baptism is but an ordinance and covenant of obedience. As seen from the scriptures and statements of Joseph Smith, the individual is baptized “unto or for” the remission of sins that can only come by the power of the Holy Ghost.

With the commitment of obedience at the age of eight, the young individual presented as the cleanest member of the Ward, was free from sin the day before their baptism. The young baptized individual, because of entering into a covenant of obedience, has also become the newest sinner of the Ward.

As the scriptures and the Prophet Joseph Smith teach: “Baptism is a sign to God, to angels, and to heaven that we do the will of God . . .”¹⁸

¹⁸ *TPJS*, p.197.