

Covenants / Obedience

11/05

“The gospel covenants and obligations bind Church members to obedience to laws and principles given of God which lead to happiness, love, and eternal joy.” (Delbert L. Stapley, *CR*, April 1959, pg. 107)

Covenants Defined

(BD 651)

“an agreement between persons or nations; more often between God and man; but in this latter case it is important to notice that the two parties to the agreement do not stand in the relation of independent and equal contractors. **God in his good pleasure fixes the terms, which man accepts.**” (BD 651)

Note - However, in religious reference, such a definition of ‘*covenant*’ as a ‘a mutual binding agreement’ is insufficient and inadequate with the given light from the Hebrew and Greek meaning of words. The Hebrew word for covenant in the Old Testament is ‘berith’ (b’rith). ‘Berith’ is an extremely interesting word, yet no one knows its exact origin or meaning. Some controversy exists whether ‘berith’ stems from the Assyrian word, ‘biritu’, meaning to bind [fetter, shackle, circumscribe], or whether it is derived from the Hebrew verb, ‘barah,’ to cut. Scriptural evidence is sufficiently available to support both positions.

Robert M. Tripp has stated: “The Hebrew phrase, ‘Karath berith’ meaning to cut a covenant is not an unusual Hebrew expression and occurs often in the idea of making or **cutting** a covenant in scripture and by so doing “only comply with the legal formalities required by ancient Hebrew law”.

This act of ancient binding or ‘cutting’ was composed of three main parts:

1. The Oath
2. The Stipulations
3. The Penalties

“These ordinances originating with God from the very beginning. They point out the serious nature of the **covenants** and the penalties involved if the **covenant** is broken...” (*Oaths, Covenants, and Promises*, pg. 207-210)

God - A Covenant Maker

The ‘Messenger of the Covenant’ (3 Nephi 24:1)

The ‘Mediator of the New Covenant’ (Hebrews 12:24)

If it is understood that the Greek word for ‘**testament**’ in Hebrew is ‘**covenant**’ (BD 651) then the names of the books in the library of the Lord are:

- The Old Testament or **Covenant**
- The New Testament or **Covenant**
- The Book of Mormon: Another Testament or **Covenant** of Jesus Christ
- The Doctrine and **Covenants**

01 – “Everlasting covenant was made between three personages before the organization of this earth, and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth; these personages, according to Abraham’s record, are called God the first, the Creator; God the second, the Redeemer; and God the third, the witness or Testator.” (Joseph Smith, *TPJS*, pg. 190)

02 – “...a covenant was entered into between Him and His Father, in which He agreed to atone for the sins of the world; and He thus, as stated, became the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.” (John Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement*, pg. 97)

Scripture itself, attests to the fact that the Lord God is a covenant making God.

Genesis 1:1 – ‘in the beginning God **created** the heaven and the earth.’

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The word 'create' in Hebrew meaning to cut out of.

The scholars in translating our Bible into English interestingly chose to use the word 'create,' rather than the more appropriate meaning for the Hebrew word '*baurau*' meaning to organize, "the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos – chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory." (Joseph Smith, *TPJS*, pg. 350-352)

Titus 1:2 – 'in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, **promised** before the world began;'

Man – A Covenant Maker

03 – 'We made vows, sacred vows, in the heavens before we came to this mortal life....'

We have made covenants. We made them before we accepted our position here on the earth [Abraham 3:25]. Now we made this commitment, '...all things whatsoever the Lord our God shall command us.' We committed ourselves to our Heavenly Father, that if He would send us to the earth and give us bodies and give to us the priceless opportunities that earth life afforded, we would keep our lives clean and would marry in the holy temple and would rear a family and teach them righteousness. This was a solemn oath, a solemn promise. He promised us an eventful mortal life with untold privileges and providing that we qualified in the way of righteousness, we would receive eternal life, and happiness and progress. **There is no other way to receive these rewards.**" (Spencer W. Kimball, *U of U Devotional*, 'Be Ye Therefore Perfect,' [January 10, 1975])

04 – "**Traditionally, God's people have been known as a covenant people.** The gospel itself is the new and everlasting covenant. The posterity of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob is the covenant race. We come into the Church by covenant, which we enter into when we go into the waters of baptism. The new and everlasting covenant of celestial marriage is the gate to exaltation in the celestial kingdom. Men receive the Melchizedek Priesthood by an oath and covenant." (Marion G. Romney *CR*, April 1962, pg. 17)

05 – "**Everyone who receives an ordinance must make a covenant, else the ordinance is not fully satisfactory.** He who is baptized covenants to keep the law of the Church; he who is administered to for sickness, and the administrators, covenant to use their faith to secure the desired healings; he who receives the temple endowment covenants to use in his life that which he has been taught; he who is ordained to the priesthood agrees to honor it, and so on with every ordinance.

That places covenants high, as they should be. Knowledge of itself has little saving power. Only as it is used does knowledge become of value. The man who learns and promises to use that knowledge is of value to society. (John A. Widtsoe, *Improvement Era*, February 1948, pg. 97)

A – Pre-mortal Covenants:

06 – "In our [premortal] state, in the day of the great council, **we made a certain agreement with the Almighty.** The Lord proposed a plan, conceived by him. We accepted it. Since the plan is intended for all men, we became parties to the salvation of every person under the plan. We agreed, right then and there, to be not only saviors for ourselves but measurably, saviors for the whole human family. We went into a partnership with the Lord. The working out of the plan became then not merely the Father's work, and the Savior's work, but also our work. The least of us, the humblest, is in partnership with the Almighty in achieving the purpose of the eternal plan of salvation." (John A. Widtsoe, *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 1934, pg. 189)

B – Birth:

07 – '...for they are given unto him to multiply and replenish the earth, according to my commandment, and **to fulfill the promise** which was given by my Father before the foundation of the world, and for their exaltation in the eternal worlds, that they may bear the souls of men; for herein is the work of my Father continued, that he may be glorified (D&C 132:63).' (Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, pg. 273; Jeffery R. Holland, *Ensign*, November 1998, pg. 77) [Note the symbol of cutting of the cord to enter into life]

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C – Baptism/Abrahamic Covenant:

08 – “Abraham first received the gospel by baptism (which is the **covenant of salvation**); then he had conferred upon him the higher priesthood, and he entered into celestial marriage (which is the **covenant of exaltation**), gaining assurance thereby that he would have eternal increase; finally he received a promise that all of these blessings would be offered to all of his mortal posterity. (Abraham 2:6-11; D&C 132:29-50). Included in the divine promises to Abraham was the assurance that Christ would come through his lineage, and the assurance that Abraham's posterity would receive certain choice, promised lands as an eternal inheritance. (Abraham 2; Gen. 17; 22:15-18; Galatians 3).

All of these promises lumped together are called the Abrahamic covenant. This covenant was renewed with Isaac (Gen. 24:60; 26:1-4, 24) and again with Jacob. (Gen. 28; 35:9-13; 48:3-4). Those portions of it which pertain to personal exaltation and eternal increase are renewed with each member of the house of Israel who enters the order of celestial marriage; through that order the participating parties become inheritors of all the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (D&C 132; Romans. 9:4; Galatians 3:4).” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, pg. 13) [Note the symbol of cutting or circumcision both of the foreskin or of the heart (Jeremiah 4:4, 9:25-26).]

D – Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood:

09 – “The Holy Priesthood is accepted by an oath and **covenant** and is binding upon those who receive it. They obligate themselves to keep faithfully all the commandments of God and to magnify their callings by honoring and exercising the priesthood in righteousness for the benefit and blessing of mankind.” (Delbert L. Stapley, *CR*, April 1959, pg. 109)

10 – “So, we have entered into a **covenant** with the Lord in which he has promised us eternal life, if we keep our part of the **covenant**, which is, to magnify our callings in the priesthood.”

The revelation says that the Lord cannot break his part of the oath and **covenant**. But we can break our part of it, and many priesthood bearers do so. Of them the revelation says: ‘But whoso breaketh this **covenant** after he hath received it, and altogether turneth therefrom, shall not have forgiveness of sins in this world nor in the world to come.’ (D&C 84:41)

Now, I do not think this means that all who fail to magnify their callings in the priesthood will have committed the unpardonable sin, but I do think that priesthood bearers who have entered into the **covenants** that we enter into – in the waters of baptism, in connection with the law of tithing, the Word of Wisdom, and the many other covenants we make – and then refuse to live up to these **covenants** will stand in jeopardy of losing the promise of eternal life.” (Marion G. Romney, *Ensign*, July 1972, pg. 99; Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, February 1993, pg. 9; Joseph Fielding Smith, *DS*, 3:141)

E – Marriage/A New and Everlasting Covenant

‘In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees; And in order to obtain the highest, a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting **covenant** of marriage]; And if he does not, he cannot obtain it. He may enter into the other, but that is the end of his kingdom; he cannot have an increase.’ (D&C 131:1-4)

‘Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall **cleave** unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.’ (Moses 3:24)

The word cleave literally means to cut, cling, fasten, or adhere.

F – Temple Covenants

11 – “We have made... solemn, sacred, holy **covenants**, pledging ourselves before gods and angels.

We are under **covenant** to live the law of obedience.

We are under **covenant** to live the law of sacrifice.

We are under **covenant** to live the law of consecration....

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It is our privilege to consecrate our time, talents, and means to build up his kingdom. We are called upon to sacrifice, in one degree or another, for the furtherance of his work. Obedience is essential to salvation; so, also, is service; and so, also, are consecration and sacrifice.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Ensign*, May 1975, pg. 51)

‘And again, verily I say unto you, how shall your washings be acceptable unto me, except ye perform them in a house which you have built to my name? For, for this cause I commanded Moses that he should build a tabernacle that they should bear it with them in the wilderness, and to build a house in the land of promise, that those ordinances might be revealed which had been hid from before the world was. Therefore, verily I say unto you, that your anointings, and your washings, and your baptisms for the dead, and your solemn assemblies, and your memorials for your sacrifices by the sons of Levi, and for your oracles in your most holy places wherein you receive conversations, and your statutes and judgments, for the beginning of the revelations and foundation of Zion, and for the glory, honor, and endowment of all her municipalities, are ordained by the ordinance of my holy house, which my people are always commanded to build unto my holy name’ (D&C 124:37-39). [Note the symbol of cutting throughout]

G – The New and Everlasting Covenant

12 – “All Latter-day Saints enter the new and everlasting **covenant** when they enter this Church. They covenant to cease sustaining, upholding and cherishing the kingdom of the devil and the kingdoms of this world. They enter into the new and everlasting **covenant** to sustain the Kingdom of God and no other kingdom. They take a vow of the most solemn kind, before the heavens and earth, and that, too, upon the validity of their own salvation, that they will sustain truth and righteousness instead of wickedness and falsehood, and build up the Kingdom of God, instead of the kingdoms of this world. (Brigham Young, *JD*, 12:230)

13 – “Now there is a clear-cut definition in detail of the new and everlasting **covenant**. It is everything – the fullness of the gospel. So marriage properly performed, baptism, ordination to the priesthood, everything else – every contract, every obligation, every performance that pertains to the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise according to his law here given, is a part of the new and everlasting **covenant**.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *DS*, 1:158)[Note the cutting off if one breaks the covenants entered into (D&C 1:14; 63:63).]

H – Many Other Covenants

14 – “Each ordinance and requirement given to man for the purpose of bringing to pass his salvation and exaltation is a covenant... Keeping the Sabbath day holy is a **covenant** between man and the Lord for he said: ‘Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: everyone that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.’ All of the Ten Commandments are everlasting **covenants**. The law of tithing is a form of an everlasting **covenant**, the covenant of revenue for the Church, although some day we shall be given a higher form of this law known as consecration. (Joseph Fielding Smith, *DS*, 1:152)

Cutting a Covenant

This process of binding, making or the cutting of a covenant is replete through out scripture. One of the clearest being in the example of Abraham:

‘And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.’

‘And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:’ (Genesis 15:9-11, 17-18)

In the example above, Abraham cuts or divides three animals asunder and placing the two birds on either side (creating a total of eight pieces = the significant number the Lord uses for covenants), then passes through them as a token,

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endorsing that he will suffer the consequence or penalty that has occurred to these animals if he breaks his covenant. The Lord then passes through (smoking furnace and a burning lamp symbolic of the presence of the Lord) as a sign of acceptance of Abraham's covenant and attestation that promises will be given in the adherence of the covenant.

Consider the following references in connection of the above given story:

'And I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof, The princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, which passed between the parts of the calf;' (Jeremiah 34:18-19)

Deliberate and serious reflection on scripture will reveal at least the following accounts in which the **cutting of a covenant** are alluded to:

- 1- Covenant of Israel exiting the world [Egypt] by passing through a **separated** [Red] sea (Exodus 14:21-22)
- 2- Covenant of Israel in the blessings and cursings of the law screamed **between** two mountains [Ebal and Gerizim] (Deuteronomy 11:29; 27-28)
- 3- Covenant of Israel inheriting a promised land by passing through the **divided** [Jordan] river (Joshua 3:15-17)
- 4- Covenant of Israel being fulfilled through the deliverance of their Messiah through the **cleaving** of a mount [Olives] (Zechariah 14:4-7)
- 5- Covenant of Israel being gathered from abroad symbolized through strength gained in a **decomposed** carcass (JST Matthew 1:22, 27)
- 6- Covenant toward Israel by their Messiah himself, in the renting of His body in a promised atonement, symbolized through the **renting** of the veil (Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 10:20)
- 7- Covenants entered into by a covenanted people to preserve and defend, symbolized through the **renting** of their clothes (Alma 46:12-21)
- 8- Covenant of Israel's remembrance of their Messiah sacrifice through the partaking of symbolic bread that has been **broken** or **torn** (3 Nephi 18:6)

Challenge of Covenant Making

15 – “When any ordinance or contract is sealed by the Spirit, it is approved with a promise of reward, provided unrighteousness does not thereafter break the seal, remove the ratifying approval, and cause loss of the promised blessing (Joseph Fielding Smith, DS, 1:55; 2: 94-99). Seals are placed on contracts through righteousness. If thereafter he became worthy through repentance and obedience, the seal would then be put in force. Similarly, if a worthy person is baptized, with the ratifying approval of the Holy Ghost attending the performance, yet the seal may be broken by subsequent sin... Subsequent worthiness will put the seal in force, and unrighteousness will break any seal.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, pg. 361-362).

16 – “Ordinances and **covenants** become our credentials for admission into his presence. To worthily receive them is the quest of a lifetime; to keep them thereafter is the challenge of mortality.” (Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, May 1987, pg. 23-24)

17 – “A good and useful and true test of every major decision made by a leader in the Church is whether a given course leads toward or away from the making and keeping of **covenants**” (“*News of the Church*,” *Ensign*, September 1987, pg. 74)

Cutting from a Covenant

(D&C 98:15)

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18 – “I feel sometimes like lecturing men and women severely who enter into covenants without realizing the nature of the covenants they make, and who use little or no effort to fulfill them.” (Brigham Young, *JD*, 3:332)

19 – “A young man came to me not long ago and said, ‘I made an agreement with a man that requires me to make certain payments each year. I am in arrears, and I can’t make those payments, for if I do, it is going to cause me to lose my home. What shall I do?’

I looked at him and said, ‘Keep your agreement.’

‘Even if it costs me my home?’

I said, ‘I am not talking about your home. I am talking about your agreement; and I think your wife would rather have a husband who would keep his word, meet his obligations, keep his pledges or his covenants, and have to rent a home than to have a home with a husband who will not keep his covenants and his pledges.’

...It is important, brethren, that we keep our pledges and our covenants and keep our name good. A man's good name is worth more than any material thing he could have.

Keep all covenants and promises.” (N. Eldon Tanner, *CR*, October 1966, pg. 100)

20 – “The fate of the covenant breaker was most severe. ‘And the soul that sins against this covenant, and hardeneth his heart against it, shall be dealt with according to the laws of my church, and shall be delivered over to the buffetings of Satan until the day of redemption.’ The breaking of any covenant that our Father in heaven makes with us, is a dreadful thing. We make a covenant in the waters of baptism. Many have broken it, and hence lose the promised blessings. All through our lives we are called to enter into covenants and many members of the Church seemingly fail to realize the seriousness of a violation or to understand that punishment must inevitably follow. Solemn covenants are taken by members of the Church in the Temples. These covenants are to prepare us for an exaltation. Yet there are many who receive them who utterly fail to heed them, but presumably, they think the Lord has a short memory, or that he is so extremely merciful that he will break his promises and the punishment mentioned for the violation will not be inflicted. In this manner many deceive themselves.” (Joseph Fielding Smith, *CHMR*, 1:322-23)

Obedience Defined

(D&C 82:8-10; D&C 130:20-21; Abraham 3:25)

21 – “Obedience is the first law of heaven, the cornerstone upon which all righteousness and progression rest.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, pg. 539)

22 – “I made this my rule, “When the Lord commands, do it” (Joseph Smith, *HC*, 2:170)

23 – “The great test of life is obedience to God.” (Ezra Taft Benson, *Ensign*, April 1988, pg. 4)

24 – “It is important to understand that obedience is not simply a requirement of a capricious God who wants us to jump hurdles for the entertainment of a royal court. It is really the pleading of a loving Father for you and me to discover, as quickly as we can, that there are key concepts and principles that will bring happiness in a planned but otherwise cold universe.” (Neal A. Maxwell, *Neal A. Maxwell Quote Book*, pg. 13-14)

25 – “The Lord has clearly charted a course for us to obtain his blessings. He is bound by his divine law to bless us for our righteousness. The overwhelming question in each age is why each generation must test his law, when the Lord’s performance from generation to generation has been absolutely consistent.” (L. Tom Perry, *Ensign*, May 1976, pg. 65)

26 – “All of the principles of the gospel are principles of promise...” (Harold B. Lee; Richard G. Scott, *Ensign*, November 1993, pg. 88)[D&C 89:3]

27 – “Obedience is a powerful spiritual medicine. It comes close to being a cure-all.” (Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, November 1987, pg. 18)

28 – “Now compare the greatest of earthly joys with the joys you receive in believing in Jesus Christ and obeying the

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Gospel he has delivered to the children of men. It is sweeter than the honeycomb; and to those who live according to it, it gives constant joy, a lasting feast not merely for an hour or a day, but for a whole life and throughout eternity.” (Brigham Young, *JD*, 8:139)

Blind Obedience vs. Enlighten Obedience

(Moses 5:5-7)

29 – “That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another. God said, 'Thou shalt not kill;' at another time He said, 'Thou shalt utterly destroy.' This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. **Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is,** although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire.” (Joseph Smith, *TPJS*, pg. 256)

30 – “It is not blind obedience, even without total understanding, to follow a father who has proved himself.” (Spencer W. Kimball, *TSWK*, pg. 59)

31 – “[O]bedience must often precede knowledge.” (J. Reuben Clark, *CR*, April 1950, pg. 181)

32 – “They are obedient because they know certain spiritual truths and have decided, as an expression of their own individual agency, to obey the commandments of God... Those who talk of blind obedience may appear to know many things, but they do not understand the doctrines of the gospel. There is an obedience that comes from a knowledge of the truth that transcends any external form of control. We are not obedient because we are blind, we are obedient because we can see.” (Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, May 1983, pg. 66)

33 – “The principles of obedience... has fallen on hard times; obedience is low on the world’s scale of values. There are causes for this, of course. Some have done terribly wrong things in obedience to unjust leaders. Some have engaged in senseless subordination to bad causes, becoming mere satellites in mindless orbits. Satan always pretzelizes principles in order to increase human misery. But obedience is so essential for the gospel journey; it must be rescued from the careless conclusions reached by sloppy intellects. The tests of obedience are always “to whom?” and “to what?” **Obedience is not blind faith but following the glimpses we get when seeing with the eye of faith.”** (Neal A. Maxwell, *Neal A. Maxwell Quote Book*, pg. 229)

Sacrificed Obedience

(John 5:30; John 6:38; Mosiah 15:1-7)

34 – “I speak of these things because I do know that if you do not yield obedience to true principles, and bring your wills into subjection thereto, you will be overcome of evil. Jesus says, I have not come to do my will, but the will of my Father who sent me. Upon the same principle I say that I have not come to do my will, but to do the will of him that sent me, even that of brother Brigham.

“This is my place and my calling, and this is my wish and the wish of brother Jedediah, of brother Amasa, of brother Parley, and of every other Apostle that God has appointed and called upon this earth, or ever will while we remain here. It is for brother Brigham to do the will of Joseph, and for Joseph to do the will of Peter, for Peter to do the will of Jesus, and for Jesus to do the will of his Father. That is the chain that reaches from heaven to earth, and do you not understand that it is so? If you will keep hold of that chain and keep your hands strongly fastened in the links, you can reach into the vail. But you must hold on firm and fast to the cable--why? Because there is an anchor at the end of the cable, and that cable is fastened to the ship so that it is made sure at both ends. That is the way it is in a ship, and it is so with the kingdom of God.” (Heber C. Kimball, *JD*, 4:3)

35 – “So it is that real, personal sacrifice never was placing an animal on the altar. Instead, it is a willingness to put the animal in us upon the altar and letting it be consumed! Such is the ‘sacrifice unto the Lord...of a broken heart and a contrite spirit,’ (D&C 59:8), a prerequisite to taking up the cross, while giving ‘away all [our] sins’ in order to know God (Alma 22:18); for the denial of self precedes the full acceptance of Him.” (Neal A. Maxwell, *Ensign*, May 1995, pg. 68)

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36 – “Obedience to God can be the very highest expression of independence. Just think of giving to him the one thing, the one gift, that he would never take. Think of giving him that one thing that he would never wrest from you...

Obedience – that which God will never take by force – he will accept when freely given. And he will then return to you freedom that you can hardly dream of – the freedom to feel and to know, the freedom to do, and the freedom to be, at least a thousand fold more than we offer him. Strangely enough, the key to freedom is obedience... We should put ourselves in a position before our Father in heaven and say, individually, ‘I do not want to do what I want to do. I want to do what thou wouldst have me do.’ Suddenly, like any father, the Lord could say, ‘Well, there is one more of my children almost free from the need of constant supervision.’” (Boyd K. Packer, BYU Address, 1971)

37 – “There is no reward for half-hearted obedience. We must become vigorous and enthusiastic about living our religion, for God commands that we serve him with all our heart, with all our might, with all our strength, and with the very best of our intelligence. **With him there can be no halfway measures. We must be fully for him or we may be classed with those who are against him.**” (Mark E. Petersen, *CR*, April 1980, pg. 96)

38 – “Half obedience will be rejected as readily as full violation, and maybe quicker, for half rejection and half acceptance is but a sham, an admission of lack of character, a lack of love for Him. It is actually an effort to live on both sides of the line.” (Mark E. Petersen, *CR*, April 1982, pg. 21)

39 – “Let us here observe, that a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation; for from the first existence of man, the faith necessary unto the enjoyment of life and salvation never could be obtained without the sacrifice of all earthly things. It was through this sacrifice, and this only, that God has ordained that men should enjoy eternal life; and it is through the medium of the sacrifice of all earthly things that men do actually know that they are doing the things that are well pleasing in the sight of God. When a man has offered in sacrifice all that he has for the truth's sake, not even withholding his life, and believing before God that he has been called to make this sacrifice because he seeks to do his will, he does know, most assuredly, that God does and will accept his sacrifice and offering, and that he has not, nor will not seek his face in vain. Under these circumstances, then, he can obtain the faith necessary for him to lay hold on eternal life.” (Joseph Smith, *Lectures On Faith*, 6:7)

Obedience vs. Disobedience

(Luke 8:16-18; Alma 12:9-11; Alma 24:30; D&C 1:13, 15-16; D&C 59:21-23; D&C 82:3; D&C 130:20-21)

40 – “We cannot keep all the commandments without first knowing them, and we cannot expect to know all, or more than we now know unless we comply with or keep those we have already received.” (Joseph Smith, *HC*, 5:135)

41 – “Brethren, if you can receive counsel, and will seek it, you will prosper in the work; if you cannot, you will not be magnified. I have seen a few over the years who were determined to pursue their own course, their own program. I have come to see that receiving counsel is a test of obedience by which the Lord magnifies His servants.” (Ezra Taft Benson, *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, pg. 333)

42 – “...keep the commandments of God; and then you will be able more perfectly to understand the difference between right and wrong-between the things of God and the things of men; and your path will be like that of the just, which shineth brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.” (Joseph Smith, *HC*, 5:31)

43 – “If we do not obey, the power to obey is lessened. Our capability to recognize good is weakened.” (Ted E. Brewerton, *Ensign*, May 1986, 68)

44 – “We are too much disposed to believe and act like the world, not rendering that submission and humble obedience to the righteousness of God.... Many are disposed through their own wickedness ‘to do as I damned please,’ and they are damned.” (Brigham Young, *JD*, 11:253-254)

45 – “The Lord has spoken against this attitude in our day: ‘But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned.’ (D&C 58:29). We have sustained by uplifted hand our living prophets. We rejoice in the privilege of

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hearing the revealed word of God in our day from our living prophets. What do we do when we hear them? Do we follow the instructions of our living prophets with exactness, or do we murmur?

Is it easier in our own age to follow a living prophet than it was in the days of Moses or Nephi? Would those who murmured against Moses and Nephi not also murmur today? The same questions can be asked in reverse. Those who murmur today would also have murmured as did Laman and Lemuel or the children of Israel against the prophet of their day with the same disastrous consequences.

The simplest of instructions may reveal the tendency to murmur. I attended a meeting once when the presiding authority invited members of the congregation to come forward in the meeting room. A few stirred. Most did not. Why not?

I feel sure there were those who questioned why they should leave their comfortable position. ‘Why should I?’ That question was, no doubt, followed promptly by an excuse or rationalization as to why it should not matter whether the seat was changed or not. I believe there followed some irritation that the presiding authority should make such a request. The last step, obvious to all who observed, was slothfulness in responding. Few moved. **Was that a small thing? Yes. But it reflected a deeper, more profound lack of willingness to obey. It reflected a spirit of disobedience. That is not a small thing.**

I was recently in a Church meeting in West Africa when a priesthood leader invited the brethren to come forward and occupy the first three rows of the chapel. Every man immediately stood and moved his seat according to instruction. **A small thing? Yes. But it reflected a willingness to obey. That is not a small thing.**

I invite you to focus on the commandment from living prophets that bothers you the most. Do you question whether the commandment is applicable to you? Do you find ready excuses why you cannot now comply with the commandment? Do you feel frustrated or irritated with those who remind you of the commandment? Are you slothful in keeping it? Beware of the deception of the adversary. Beware of murmuring.” (H. Ross Workman, *Ensign*, November 2001, pg. 85-87)

46 – “The object with me is to obey and teach others to obey God in just what He tells us to do. It mattereth not whether the principle is popular or unpopular, I will always maintain a true principle, even if I stand alone in it.” (Joseph Smith, *TPJS*, pg. 332)

Classic Stories on Obedience

(Abraham - Genesis 22; D&C 101:4-5)

47 – “If God had known any other way whereby he could have touched Abraham’s feelings more acutely and more keenly, he would have done so.” (Joseph Smith; John Taylor, *JD* 24:204)

48 – “You will have all kinds of trials to pass through. And it is quite as necessary for you to be tried as it was for Abraham and other men of God... God will feel after you, and he will take hold of you and wrench your very heart strings, and if you cannot stand it you will not be fit for an inheritance in the Celestial kingdom of God.” (Joseph Smith; John Taylor, *JD* 24:197)

49 – “Now, why did the Lord ask such things of Abraham? Because, knowing what his future would be and that he would be the father of an innumerable posterity, he was determined to test him. God did not do this for His own sake; for He knew by His foreknowledge what Abraham would do; but the purpose was to impress upon Abraham a lesson, and to enable him to attain unto knowledge that he could not obtain in any other way. That is why God tries all of us. It is not for His own knowledge; for He knows all things beforehand. He knows all your lives and everything you will do. But He tries us for our own good, that we may know ourselves; for it is most important that a man should know himself. He required Abraham to submit to this trial because He intended to give him glory, exaltation and honor; He intended to make him a king and a priest, to share with Himself the glory, power and dominion which He exercised. And was this trial any more than God Himself had passed through? God the Eternal Father gave His Only Begotten Son to die for us; and He wanted to see whether Abraham was as willing to sacrifice his son of promise as He Himself was to sacrifice His well beloved, His first born, Jesus Christ. And what of Isaac? *Josephus tells us that Isaac was old enough to carry the wood for the sacrifice; and after his father had told him what the Lord wanted, Isaac, in the spirit of submission that such a son had for such a father, said to him, "If the Lord had not commanded you to do this, father, I*

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would have, been willing to have done whatever you required of me." In this Isaac exhibited a spirit akin to that manifested by the Lord Jesus; and Abraham showed a willingness akin to that exhibited by the Father in offering up His Only Begotten Son for the rest of His brethren and sisters." (George Q. Cannon, *CR*, April 1899, pg. 66)

(Achan - Joshua 6-7)

50 – “**There is no such thing as private sin.** Although its commission can be calculated . . . , its effects cannot be regulated by the person guilty of the misbehavior.” (Dean L. Larsen, *Ensign*, May 1983, pg. 35)

51 – “**Private choices are not private; they all have public consequences.** There is a popular notion that doing our own thing or doing what feels good is our own business and affects no one but us.... It simply is not true that our private conduct is our own business. Our society is the sum total of what millions of individuals do in their private lives. That sum total of private behavior has worldwide public consequences of enormous magnitude. There are no completely private choices.” (James E. Faust, *Ensign*, May 1987, pg. 80)

(Saul - 1 Samuel 15)

52 – “I was reminded of an experience we had in Colorado when we were reorganizing a stake. The meeting was nearly over, there were about ten minutes left, and neither of us had spoken. The stake president announced me. President Kimball leaned over and said, ‘Please, you take all of the time.’ I bore a one-minute testimony and returned to my seat. As the stake president was announcing President Kimball, I noticed him writing a note. As he stood, he handed it to me. On it were five words, ‘Obedience is better than sacrifice.’ (Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, May 1975, pg. 104)

(Naaman - 2 Kings 5)

53 – “Naaman needed to have the faith of a child to be obedient as a child before his flesh became clean as a little child’s.” (Victor L. Brown, *Ensign*, May 1985, pg. 16)

54 – “**And so I repeat, do not let pride stand in your way.** The way of the gospel is a simple way. Some of the requirements may appear to you as elementary and unnecessary. Do not spurn them. Humble yourselves and walk in obedience. I promise that the results that follow will be marvelous to behold and satisfying to experience.” (Gordon B. Hinckley, *Ensign*, November 1976, pg. 96)

(Uzza - 1 Chronicles 13)

55 – “President David O. McKay stated, **this incident conveys a lesson of life: obedience—full obedience.**” (Ted E. Brewerton, *Ensign*, May 1981, pg. 69)

(Nephi - 1 Nephi 3-4)

56 – “**No obstacles are insurmountable when God commands and we obey.**” (Heber J. Grant, *CR*, October 1899, pg. 18)

(Stripling Warrior - Alma 56-57)

“they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with **exactness**” (Alma 57:21)

Conclusions and Consequences of Obedience

(John 14:15; D&C 14:7; D&C 41:5)

57 – “Personal spiritual symmetry emerges from the shaping of prolonged obedience. Twigs are bent, not snapped into shape.” (Neal A. Maxwell, *Ensign*, May 1990, 34)

58 – “With every ounce of . . . obedience comes a bushel of blessings.” (Neal A. Maxwell, *Neal A. Maxwell Quote Book*, pg. 229)

59 – “Do you think that people will obey the truth because it is true, unless they love it? No, they will not. Truth is obeyed when it is loved. Strict obedience to the truth will alone enable people to dwell in the presence of the Almighty.” (Brigham Young, *JD*, 7:55)