

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



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of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

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ONLY BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD

See: Jesus Christ: Only Begotten in the Flesh

OPPOSITION

Opposition and AGENCY are eternal and interrelated principles in the theology of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Agency is man's innate power to choose between alternative commitments and finally between whole ways of life. Opposition is the framework within which these choices and their consequences are possible.

In his account of the FALL OF ADAM, LEHI teaches that the philosophy of opposites is at the heart of the plan of redemption. Had ADAM and EVE continued in a state of premortal innocence, they would have experienced "no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin" (2 Ne. 2:23). Hence, Lehi concludes, "it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things . . . [otherwise] righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad" (2 Ne. 2:11).

Latter-day Saints understand that contrast and opposition were manifest in PREMORTAL LIFE as well as on EARTH (Abr. 3:23–28; Moses 6:56) and that the distinction between good and evil is eternal. Prior to earth life the spirits of all men had opportunities to choose God and demonstrate love for him by obeying his LAW (Matt. 22:37) or to yield to satanic proposals for rebellion and coercion (2 Ne. 2:11–15; cf. Luke 16:13; 2 Ne. 10:16). Different, indeed opposite, consequences followed these choices (Abr. 3:26).

Scripture relates the principle of opposition to crucial states of human experience. Among them are life and death, knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, growth and atrophy.

LIFE AND DEATH. As a consequence of Adam and Eve's partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they and all their posterity became subject to physical death and to the afflictions and degeneration of the mortal body (2 Ne. 9:6–7). They also became subject to spiritual death, which means spiritual separation from God because of SIN. However, through Christ, provision had already been made for their redemption (2 Ne. 2:26), the overcoming of both deaths, and

the return to the presence of God. In the span of eternity, the worst form of death is subjection to Satan and thereby exclusion from the presence of God (2 Ne. 2:29). Christ came to bring life, abundant life, everlasting life with God (John 10:28; 17:3; D&C 132:23–24).

KNOWLEDGE AND IGNORANCE. Opposition was, and is, a prerequisite of authentic KNOWLEDGE, "for if they never should have bitter they could not know the sweet" (D&C 29:39; cf. 2 Ne. 2:15). Such knowledge is participative. Because "it is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance" (D&C 131:6), the Prophet Joseph SMITH taught, "A man is saved no faster than he gets [such] knowledge" (TPJS, p. 217; cf. 357). One may aspire to all truth (D&C 93:28), but not without confronting the heights and depths of mortal experience, either vicariously or actually.

LIGHT AND DARKNESS. Latter-day Saints find a parallel between light and darkness, the concept of the "two ways," and the idea of the warring "sons of darkness" and "sons of light" apparent in the DEAD SEA SCROLLS. Jesus teaches that "if therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:23) and that "he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation" (D&C 82:3). Finally, the sons and daughters of God are to reach the point where "there shall be no darkness in [them]" (D&C 88:67).

GROWTH AND ATROPHY. The principle of opposition also implies that people cannot be tested and strengthened unless there are genuine alternatives (Abr. 3:23–25) and resistances. Life is a predicament in which there are real risks, real gains, real losses. From such tests emerge responsibility, judgment, and soul growth. Latter-day Saints believe that this encounter with choice and conditions for progression will continue forever. It follows that in the gospel framework, once one is committed, there is no such thing as neutrality or standing still. Joseph Smith taught, "If we are not drawing towards God in principle, we are going from Him" (TPJS, p. 216).

One may err in religion by attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable; so one may assume opposition when there is none. In some forms of Judaism and Christianity, for example, the view prevails that the flesh and the spirit are opposed and antithetical. PAUL is often cited in this connec-

tion. But a close reading of Paul and other writers shows that “flesh” most often applies to man bound by SIN, and “spirit” to one regenerated through Christ. Thus, it is not the flesh, but the vices of the flesh that are to be avoided. And it is not the earth, but worldliness (wickedness) that is to be transcended (JST Rom. 7:5–27). Similarly, Latter-day Saints do not finally pit faith against reason, or the spirit against the senses, or the life of contemplation against the life of activity and service. Only when these are distorted are they opposed, for when the self is united under Christ, they are reconciled.

In the plan of redemption, opposition is not obliterated but overcome: evil by good, death by life, ignorance by knowledge, darkness by light, weakness by strength.

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ORDINANCES

[*This entry consists of two articles: An Overview, a general discussion of the nature of ordinances in the broadest sense, and Administration of Ordinances, the actual ecclesiastical procedures involved in the authorization and performance of ordinances in the Church.*]

OVERVIEW

The word “ordinance” is derived from the Latin *ordinare*, which means to put in order or sequence; or to act by authorization or command. Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regard religious ordinances not as arbitrarily established but as purposefully instituted by GOD and eternal in scope.

The power to perform ordinances whose validity is recognized by God is inseparably connected with the divine AUTHORITY conferred on mortal man, that is, the PRIESTHOOD of God: “Which priesthood continueth in the church of God in all generations. . . . Therefore, in the ordinances thereof, the power of godliness is manifest. And without the ordinances thereof, and the authority of the priesthood, the power of godliness is

not manifest unto men in the flesh” (D&C 84:17, 20–21).

Ordinances in the Church contain instructions and rich SYMBOLISM. Anointing with consecrated OIL (e.g., as in the TEMPLE) is reminiscent of the use of sacred oil in the coronation of kings and the calling of PROPHETS in ancient days. Laying hands on the head of the sick symbolically suggests the invocation and transmission of power from on high. The “waters of baptism” richly symbolize the actuality of new birth.

Latter-day scriptures give ample evidence that God has established unchangeable, eternal ordinances as essential elements of the PLAN OF SALVATION and redemption (Isa. 24:5; Mal. 3:7; Alma 13:16; D&C 124:38). The Prophet Joseph SMITH taught that “the ordinances of the Gospel . . . were laid out before the foundations of the world” and “are not to be altered or changed. All must be saved on the same principles” (*TPJS*, pp. 367, 308).

A biblical example of the necessity of ordinances can be found in the Lord’s statement to Nicodemus that one must “be born again” (John 3:3). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that “being born again comes by the spirit of God through ordinances” (*TPJS*, p. 162). The process of salvation is experienced as a “mighty change in your hearts” (Alma 5:14) under the guidance and assistance of the Spirit of God through keeping the divine ordinances. The test of obedience is reiterated in modern times, a pattern that is said to apply “in all cases under the whole heavens.” One is fully accepted of God and is “of God” if, and only if, she or “he obey mine ordinances” (D&C 52:14–19). Some ordinances are universal in nature (cf. Lev. 18:4; Rom. 13:2; Alma 30:3; D&C 136:4), while others are rites and ceremonies decreed for special purposes within the Lord’s work (e.g., Num. 18:8; Heb. 9:10; Alma 13:8; D&C 128:12).

Ordinances, in the sense of rituals and ceremonies, embrace the entire mortal life of God’s sons and daughters and are performed by the Lord’s authorized representatives, the bearers of his priesthood. Indeed, ordinances are the visible aspect of priesthood efficacy, the operation of proper divine authority conferred upon mortal man.

Some ordinances are prerequisite for entering celestial glory (BAPTISM, GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST) and for EXALTATION (priesthood ordina-