

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM



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

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Conference chamber inside the RLDS Auditorium, in Independence, Missouri, with choir and orchestra. Courtesy Library-Archives, Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

styles and depths of caring ministries not before experienced in the church. The developing Temple School courses and the programs of the Temple Ministries Division have begun to create new life and energy in RLDS branches and members in many of the forty nations where the church is established. Since World War II, the RLDS church has also become much more ecumenical than at any previous time. A resolution passed at the 1990 World Conference requested the First Presidency to go beyond the bounds of the church for help. The specific intent was that the RLDS church would seek those whose experience and expertise would equip them to give valuable help to the forthcoming temple programs in the area of peace and justice.

The RLDS church seems intent on shedding many of the vestiges of its sectarian background of early Mormonism. To what extent it can discard these while retaining its identity as a recognizable part of Latter Day Saintism remains to be seen.

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REPENTANCE

Repentance is the process by which humans set aside or overcome sins by changing hearts, attitudes, and actions that are out of harmony with God's teachings, thereby conforming their lives more completely to his will. In the words of one latter-day prophet, repentance is "to change one's mind in regard to past or intended actions or conduct" (McKay, p. 14). Paul observes that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). For this reason, the Lord "gave commandment that all men must repent" (2 Ne. 2:21; Moses 6:57). This means that repentance is required of every soul who has not reached perfection.

Repentance has been central to God's dealings with his children since they were first placed on the earth. Old Testament prophets constantly called the children of Israel individually and collectively to repent and *turn* to God and righteous living from rebellion, apostasy, and SIN. In New Testament times, the work of Jesus Christ on earth may be described as a ministry of repentance—that is, of calling on God's children to return to their God by changing their thinking and behavior and becoming more godlike. The Savior taught, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). Christ's apostles were called primarily to preach FAITH in Christ and to declare repentance to all the world

(Mark 6:12). In modern times, few topics occur in the Lord's revelations as pervasively as this one. He has given latter-day prophets and all messengers of his gospel repeated instructions to declare "nothing but repentance unto this generation" (D&C 6:9). The Prophet Joseph Smith identified repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as the two fundamental principles of the gospel (A of F 4). And the gospel itself has been called "a gospel of repentance" (D&C 13; 84:27).

In modern as in earlier times, the term "repentance" literally means a turning from sin and a reversing of one's attitudes and behavior. Its purposes are to develop the divine nature within all mortal souls by freeing them from wrong or harmful thoughts and actions and to assist them in becoming more Christlike by replacing the "natural man" (1 Cor. 2:14) with the "new man" in Christ (Eph. 4:20–24).

This process is not only necessary in preparing humans to return and live with God, but it enlarges their capacity to love their fellow beings. Those who have reconciled themselves with God have the spiritual understanding, desire, and power to become reconciled with their fellow beings. God has commanded all humans to forgive each other: "I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men" (D&C 64:10). As God shows his love by forgiving ("I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"; Jer. 31:34), his children, as they forgive others, also reflect this love.

True repentance, while seldom easy, is essential to personal happiness, emotional and spiritual growth, and eternal SALVATION. It is the only efficacious way for mortals to free themselves of the permanent effects of sin and the inevitable attendant burden of guilt. To achieve it, several specific changes must occur. One must first recognize that an attitude or action is out of harmony with God's teachings and feel genuine sorrow or remorse for it. Paul calls this "godly sorrow" (2 Cor. 7:10). Other scriptures describe this state of mind as "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (Ps. 51:17; 2 Ne. 2:7; 3 Ne. 9:20). This recognition must produce an inward change of attitude. The prophet Joel exhorted Israel to "rend your heart, and not your garments" (Joel 2:12–13), thereby bringing the inner transformation necessary to begin the process of repentance.

Some form of CONFESSION is also necessary in repentance. In some cases, the transgressor may

need to confess to the person or persons wronged or injured and ask forgiveness; in other cases, it may be necessary to confess sins to a Church leader authorized to receive such confessions; in still other cases, a confession to God alone may be sufficient; and sometimes all three forms of confession may be necessary.

In addition, repentance requires restitution to others who have suffered because of the sin. Whenever possible, this should be done by making good any physical or material losses or injury. Even when this is not possible, repentance requires other, equally significant actions, such as apologies; increased acts of kindness and service toward offended persons; intensified commitment to, and activity in, the Lord's work; or all of these in concert.

Finally, for repentance to be complete, one must abandon the sinful behavior. A change of heart begins the process; a visible outward change of direction, reflected in new patterns of behavior, must complete it (Mosiah 5:2). Failure to alter outward actions means that the sinner has not repented, and the weight of the former sin returns (D&C 82:7; cf. Matt. 18:32–34).

One purpose of repentance is to bless people by affording through forgiveness the one and only way of relieving the suffering that attends sin: "For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; but if they would not repent, they must suffer even as I" (D&C 19:16–17).

The Lord has repeatedly promised that all who repent completely shall find forgiveness of their sins, which in turn brings great joy. The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin exemplify the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:4–10); the parable of the prodigal son (or lost son) illustrates the joy in heaven and similar joy in the circle of family and friends and within the repentant son himself over his return from sin (Luke 15:11–32).

Though repentance is indispensable to eternal salvation and to earthly happiness, it is not sufficient by itself to reunite a person with God. Complete repentance first requires faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which in turn generates strong motivation and power to repent. Both are necessary for, and thus must precede, BAPTISM, the reception of the GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST, and MEMBERSHIP in the Lord's kingdom. After awakening faith in Christ in the hearts of his listeners on

the day of Pentecost, Peter exhorted them to “repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). Only with the requisite repentance, symbolized by a “broken heart and a contrite spirit” and the abandonment of former sinful deeds and thought patterns, is one prepared to be baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, and have all previous sins remitted. Through baptism, a repentant person enters the kingdom of God by making covenants to remember Christ always and keep his commandments. The REMISSION OF SINS comes “by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Ne. 31:17; D&C 20:37).

Since repentance is an ongoing process in the mortal effort to become Christlike, the need for it never diminishes. It requires active, daily application as humans recognize and strive to overcome sin and error and in this way ENDURE TO THE END. For this reason, the Lord has instituted a means whereby each person who has repented and entered into the baptismal covenant may renew it by partaking of the SACRAMENT in remembrance of him. This time of self-examination allows one to reflect on the promises made at baptism, which were to take Christ’s name upon oneself, to remember him always, and to keep his commandments. Thus, the process of repentance is kept alive by this frequent period of reflection as the participant partakes of symbols of Christ’s body and blood in remembrance of his sacrifice to atone for human sin.

Scriptures inform us that “this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God” and that so-called deathbed repentance is usually not effective:

Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. . . . If ye have procrastinated the day of your repentance even until death, behold, ye have become subjected to the spirit of the devil [Alma 34:32–35].

To return to God’s presence, mortals must strive during this life to attain Christlike qualities, which can only be gained by turning from sin. To defer such efforts blocks the exercise of faith essential to repentance, prevents the operation of the Holy Ghost, and retards the development of the personal qualities reflected in the “broken heart and contrite spirit” necessary to live in God’s presence.

Repentance is one of the most powerful redemptive principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Without it, there would be no eternal progression, no possibility of becoming Christlike, no relief from the burden of guilt that every human incurs in a lifetime. With it, there is the glorious promise uttered by Isaiah that even for grievous sins there might be forgiveness: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isa. 1:18).

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RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS

The concept of a restoration of all things is biblical and is frequently spoken of in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Peter spoke of the anticipated “times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21). Latter-day Saints understand this as a prophetic anticipation of a full and final restoration of the gospel in the development and fulfillment of the purposes of God in the LAST DAYS. The current era is therefore called the DISPENSATION OF THE FULNESS OF TIMES in which all things will be gathered together in Christ (Eph. 1:10; D&C 27:13). The Church teaches that every gospel truth and blessing, and all priesthood authority, keys, ORDINANCES, and COVENANTS necessary for mankind’s eternal salvation have been, or will be, restored in this dispensation. In this manner, the blessings of DISPENSATIONS past will “flow into the most glorious and greatest of dispensations, like clear streams flowing into a mighty river” (DS 1:168).

The restoration spoken of in the scriptures involves more than a reestablishment of the