

MARK A. SHIELDS

The
SACRAMENT
and Your
Endowment



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Hardback ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-4740-3
Ebook ISBN 13: 978-1-4621-4763-2

Published by CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc.
2373 W. 700 S., Suite 100, Springville, UT 84663
Distributed by Cedar Fort, Inc., www.cedarfort.com

Library of Congress Registration Number: 2023951771

Cover design by Shawnda Craig
Cover design © 2023 Cedar Fort, Inc.
Edited and Typeset by Kyle Lund

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed on acid-free paper

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Part One

A Brief Overview of the Sacrament of the
Lord's Supper

The Sacrament Defined

ACCORDING TO *WEBSTER'S NEW WORLD DICTIONARY OF THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE*, the word *sacrament* comes through middle English and old French from the Latin *sacramentum*, which originally meant “the sum deposited by the two parties to a suit.” With the Latin root *sacere* meaning *sacred*, this definition suggests that this deposit from both sides was made in a sacred space. *Suit* in this case refers to a formal pleading, a formal request, or a petition. A *sacrament* would therefore be viewed as the joint contribution from each of the two parties to a formal pleading, obviously for some sort of blessing. That contribution would be offered or memorialized in a sacred space.

This base definition gives us plenty to look for as we study the sacrament:

1. The “sum deposited.” This is an offering. What is our offering? What does the Lord in turn promise?
2. The “suit” at issue. What blessing(s) are we pleading and petitioning from the Lord? What are we really asking of Him?
3. What is the sacred space where we make this exchange or agreement?

While *Webster's* teaches this about the origin of the word, retired BYU professor Daniel Peterson adds this about the historical application of *sacramentum*.

In Roman law, the “sacramentum” was a deeply sacred oath. In particular, it was the oath taken by soldiers, and especially by the newly enlisted, to be true and faithful both to their commanding general and, in the days of the Roman Republic, to the Republic itself (as represented by the Roman consul). Later, with the rise of the Empire, it became an oath made specifically to the emperor and renewed annually by all of the imperial armies. Accordingly, to violate the oath was desertion, dereliction of duty and perhaps even treason.

The late-fourth-century Roman writer Vegetius preserves the words of the sacramentum as he knew them: “The soldiers swear that they shall faithfully execute all that the Emperor commands, that they shall never desert the service, and that they shall not seek to avoid death for the Roman republic!”

In the ancient Roman conception, the sacramentum was different from oaths commonly taken in court and elsewhere. Most oaths were viewed as creating bonds between members of the earthly community; the sacramentum, by contrast, created a relationship between the human swearing it and the gods.

The person who swore the sacramentum became, himself, “sacer,” something “given to God or the gods” or, in the related English word, “sacred.” [01](#)

Two parts of this insight stand out in particular to me. The first is the promise to do all the oath-takers may be commanded by their leader. That represents a whole lot of trust. It's a commitment to complete obedience. The second great impression is the oath to never desert. This is a lifetime commitment. It is also an acknowledgment that there is no retirement from this oath. It is a permanent way of life.

Webster's goes on to note the origin of the base word *sacramentum* comes from the base word *sacrare*, meaning *to consecrate*. We are certainly familiar with that word. It in turn comes from the Latin base *sacer*, which of course means *sacred*. This is the same base for our word *sacrifice*, which means *to make sacred*. This part of the definition emphasizes that the sacrament is clearly related to the sacrifice of our Savior. Taking it one step further, the sacrament is our means to the end that is consecration. It is the means for us to be made holy.

That is the origin of the word. Finally, we are ready to get to the actual definition in *Webster's*. "1. In Christianity, any of certain rites ordained by Jesus; baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, holy orders, matrimony, and extreme unction are the seven recognized by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Eastern churches; Protestants generally recognize only baptism and the Lord's Supper."

According to this definition, what would be the sacraments in the restored Church of Jesus Christ? Certainly baptism and confirmation for the gift of the Holy Ghost would qualify. The sacrament of the Lord's supper each week would also qualify as a sacrament, as redundant as that might sound. Now think of the individual ordinances and covenants of the temple. Brigham Young defined the endowment as "*all* those ordinances [plural] of the house of the Lord, which are necessary for you to enable you to walk back to the presence of God . . . and gain your exaltation in spite of earth and hell."² They, too, serve to consecrate us, to make us holy, to help us put into practice the sacrifice of our Savior: the Atonement.

Webster's continues with other examples and definitions that gives us further insight: "2. Sometimes the Eucharist. 3. a) the consecrated bread and wine used in the Eucharist. b) the bread alone. Often with *blessed* or *holy*." We can certainly relate to this definition. We typically and properly refer to the Sabbath ordinance of taking the bread and the water as the sacrament. This is certainly the most familiar sacrament to us in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is the sacrament to which I refer throughout this book, unless specifically noted otherwise. The point from *Webster's*, and from the Gospel itself, is that the Sabbath ordinance of taking the bread and water in remembrance of Jesus is one of several sacraments, properly speaking.

Continuing with *Webster's*, there are still more insights to learn. "4. Something regarded as having a sacred character or mysterious meaning. 5. A symbol or token." We know this word *token*, which itself comes from the word for *symbol*. It is an emblem, a representation of something greater. It is also the physical proof of an agreement or covenant. The sacrament, again referring to the Sabbath ordinance of taking the bread and water in remembrance of the Savior, therefore serves as an emblem or a physical reminder or proof of our covenants with the Lord.

Finally, *Webster's* finishes with something big. "6. A solemn oath or pledge, as one ratified by a rite." The sacrament stands by itself as a solemn oath. It is an ordinance and a covenant in its own right, not merely a symbol, representation, reflection, or repetition of other such covenants.

Sacrament as Defined by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

When serving as the president of Brigham Young University prior to his calling to the Quorum of the Twelve, Elder Holland gave what I consider to be the greatest sermon ever given on the law of chastity. In that talk, he gave so many insights into the sacrament that I just have to quote the talk paragraph by paragraph.

[Sacraments are] symbolic of a union between mortals and deity, between otherwise ordinary and fallible humans uniting for a rare and special moment with God himself and all the powers by which he gives life in this wide universe of ours.

. . . For our purpose here today, a sacrament could be any one of a number of gestures or acts or ordinances that unite us with God and His limitless powers. We are imperfect and mortal; he is perfect and immortal. But from time to time—indeed, as often as is possible and appropriate—we find ways and go to places and create circumstances where we can unite symbolically with him and, in so doing gain access to his power. Those special moments of union with God are sacramental moments—such as kneeling at a marriage altar, or blessing a newborn baby, or partaking of the Lord’s supper. This latter ordinance is the one we in the Church have come to associate most traditionally with the word *sacrament*, though it is technically only one of many such moments when we formally take the hand of God and feel His divine power.

These are moments when we quite literally unite our will with God’s will, our spirit with his Spirit, where communion through the veil becomes very real. At such moments we not only acknowledge his divinity, but we quite literally take something of that divinity to ourselves. Such are the holy sacraments.⁰³

Summary

- The word *sacrament* properly refers to any of the saving and exalting ordinances of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Unless otherwise noted, the word will be used to refer to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the partaking of blessed bread and water in remembrance of the Savior’s sacrifice, throughout this book.
- *Webster’s* lists seven sacraments according to the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. It may be helpful to ponder what ordinances such a list in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints would include.
- *Sacrament* comes to us from the Latin *sacramentum*, meaning what two parties to a formal pleading bring to a holy place (think: prayer, covenant).
- With this base definition, it will be helpful to ask yourself throughout this book and during the sacrament ordinance what we are offering to the Lord and what we in turn hope to receive from the Lord.
- The root word comes from the Latin *sacrare*, meaning *to consecrate*, which in turn comes from *sacer*, meaning *sacred* or *holy*. The sacrament is therefore related to the Gospel principles and laws of consecration and sacrifice and

especially to the Atonement.

- Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has described *sacraments* as a “symbolic union between mortals and deity” and “when we quite literally unite our will with God’s will, our spirit with His Spirit, where communion through the veil becomes very real.”
- *Webster’s* also defines *sacrament* as a symbol or token. This points us to lessons learned through symbolism in the sacrament. A *token* is also understood to mean the physical proof of a covenant between two parties.

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- 01 Daniel Peterson, “The Surprisingly Meaningful History behind the Word ‘Sacrament,’” *LDS Living*, August 22, 2019.
- 02 *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954), 416.
- 03 Jeffrey R. Holland, *Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments*, BYU Speeches, Jan 12th, 1988.
<https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/jeffrey-r-holland/souls-symbols-sacraments/>

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