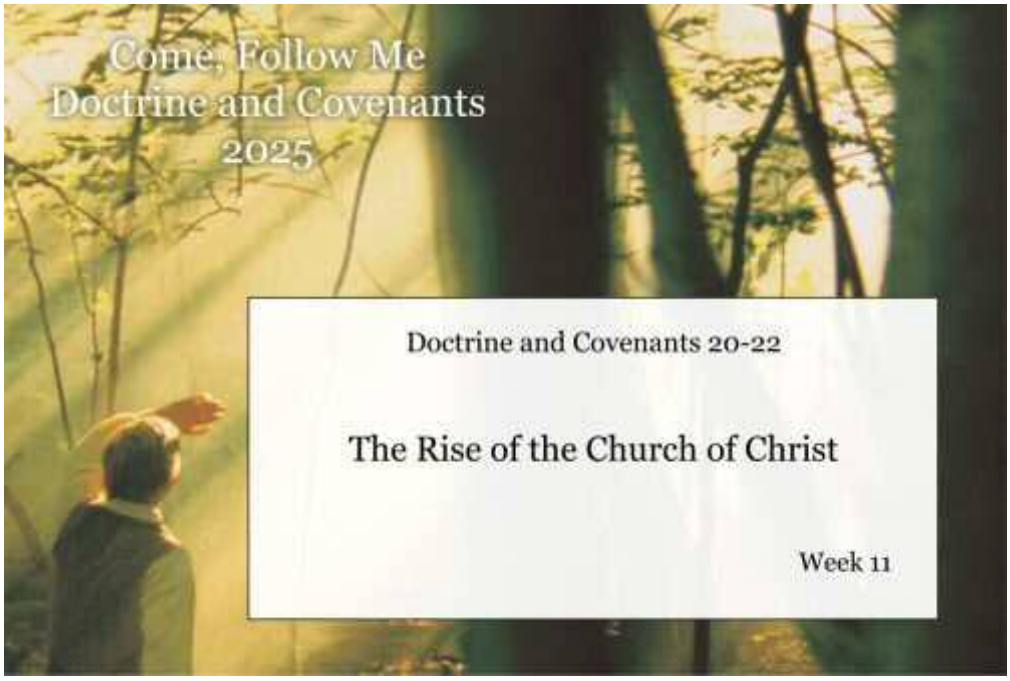

On the surface this lesson is about the organization and administration of Christ's church in this dispensation. The real discussion should be about the church being the provider of our covenant path back to God.

It's true that section 20 is all about the duties of various priesthood offices. But what good are the offices and the duties of those offices without the covenants behind them that require each of them be defined, and why? The prophets don't talk about the ordinance path, though God has defined the specific ordinances each of us needs to experience in order to return to His presence. As important as those ordinances are, our salvation is determined in the end by the covenants we make and how well we live each one.

Each of us needs a priesthood holder with the proper authority from God to administer all the needed ordinances of salvation. That process requires another person who is involved in administering the ordinances to us. But what weighs the most, once we have received those one-time ordinances, is how we live each day of our life afterwards. The ordinances are a checklist of items. The covenants we make in the process of receiving those ordinances are life-changing and character-defining.

Repentance through covenants

If I repent of my sins, but without having had the ordinances of salvation administered by one holding the proper authority of God, I can change my habits, but I can't change my nature that causes sin in the first place. It is when I repent and go to the Lord in humility, receive the ordinances from one who is authorized by Him to administer them that I enter into a partnership with God, through His priesthood power, to begin to change into a person who is worthy of living in the presence of God for eternity.

The covenants we make through the ordinances God gives us enables Him to work with us in specific ways to change our hearts and ennoble our characters. Covenants with God, through His priesthood power is the method He has assigned to us that ultimately enable us to return to His presence. Christ's atoning sacrifice is the center of our covenant attention. Only in and through the covenants we make to become more like Christ can we be saved.

When I am baptized by one having the authorized priesthood of God, I make a covenant to put Christ at the center of my life. Mosiah 18:8-10 lists our baptismal covenants. Note here that the ordinance of baptism is an individual effort, yet to keep the covenants we make at baptism requires being involved with others constantly. I encourage you to count the number of covenants listed below that involve only you, versus the number of covenants that require you to be like Christ to someone else.

> 8 And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light;
>
> 9 Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—
>
> 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?

There are four main covenants we make in the process of receiving the ordinance of baptism. All of them require we become something we currently are not. To do that requires the use of the Holy Ghost. His responsibility in the Godhead is to teach us all things required of us to become more like Christ. The gift of His presence in our life is

only granted through the authorization of the priesthood available in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, God's church. So yes, the structure of a church plays a vital role in the accomplishment of our salvation.

Repentance by making and keeping covenants with God through the priesthood power is essential for salvation. Repentance is centered in Christ and his atoning sacrifice, for it is his enabling grace that makes it possible for us to make the changes needed for us to turn from what we are today into what we need to be in the eternities. Our repentance is the process of becoming godly in our character, habits, and personality. This is all part of the package God gave us in His plan for our salvation. This is what was lost in the great Apostacy, and what was given back to us in the process of the Restoration through Joseph Smith, the prophet.

The covenant life

To make a covenant is a personal and individual action, but to live by a covenant isn't. We cannot live the covenants we have made without affecting, and being affected by, the lives of all those around us. Covenants become a family affair - the family of God. How can a priesthood holder fulfill the obligations of his individual office by himself when his responsibilities include such things as those found in Doctrine and Covenants 20:53-55.

> 53 The teacher’s duty is to watch over the church always, and be with and strengthen them;
>
> 54 And see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither hardness with each other, neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking;
>
> 55 And see that the church meet together often, and also see that all the members do their duty.

You may or may not be aware that each priesthood office from Deacon on up builds upon the responsibilities of the office below it. Whatever the Deacon is supposed to do, so is the teacher, plus those responsibilities the Teacher is supposed to do that the Deacon can't. When made a Priest the Teacher's and the Deacon's responsibilities are still there, but the Priest can now baptize and ordain those of lesser office. This pattern continues to build all the way up to the office of the Apostleship. In the Melchizedek priesthood the added responsibilities are increasingly those of an administrative

nature. At no time does the Lord say that we have enough responsibility doing administrative things, so we no longer have the calling to serve one another and watch out for another's welfare. The basic responsibilities to care for one another and to encourage righteous living is always and forever present in every priesthood holder's list of duties.

No one can make and keep priesthood covenants without keeping the commandments as presented in the covenants of baptism. Going to the Temple only adds to our list of promises we make to the Lord to become more focused on a Christlike life. And we always are tasked by the Lord to help Him in His work of bringing and sharing salvation with all our brothers and sisters, whether living here or on the other side of the veil of death. Can you see why repentance and covenants make all the difference in the ability of the Holy Ghost to change our natures into more Christlike patterns? We can't accomplish all these demands we accept without the Spirit's help and constant companionship. The gospel is never truly learned through just study. It must be studied then learned through living the covenants. Only then do we come to appreciate what the Lord is trying to accomplish in our life.

Promises of the Lord

When God promises to bless and protect His children, some of those promises extend in part to those who do their best to live His commandments, but haven't made any covenants with Him. They are striving to live an honorable Terrestrial life serving the Savior the best they know how. The Lord blesses all those who honor His Son and seek to live his commandments.

His highest promises are reserved for those who commit their lives to His service through sacred priesthood covenants found only in His duly organized church. His greatest promises are for the covenant makers and keepers. We are promised the gift of the Holy Ghost to help us change our own natures and to help us lift each other. We are promised that He will reveal spiritual things to us that cannot be had in any other way, and to grant us His kind of life after this life, which is eternal life, God's life. (That's a lot of life!) This is what exaltation is all about.

Covenants unlock the highest gifts of God. They enable Him to help us by changing our dispositions, habits, and attitudes as we repent and serve His Son by serving one

another. The covenants we make are not one-sided promises. In exchange for our efforts to become more like Christ through repentance, God promises us abilities and blessings not available to those who don't make this sacred exchange of promises with Him. Our Father in Heaven delights in the opportunity to do more for us. The more the better. He loves to see us grow and become all we are meant to become. This is, after all, His work and His glory.

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