

April 28, 1999

Why our temple service is called an ‘endowment.’ LeGrand Baker

An endowment is a self-perpetuating gift, but an “endowment” and a “gift” are not the same thing. For example, several years ago when Elder Oaks was president of BYU he announced to the faculty that the university would receive a one million dollar endowment from a donor who stipulated that the money must be spent in planting and caring for trees on campus. He pointed out that if that money earned 4% interest, it would give the university \$40,000 to spend on trees each year. (He said he made the announcement to avoid criticism when people noticed the administration was spending so much money on trees even though they were turning down requests to spend money elsewhere.) Now, as years have passed, the campus is becoming a garden of beautiful trees. But the \$1,000,000 has never been spent. Only the interest is spent, and the endowment is still intact. If the money had been a “gift,” it would have been spent until it was gone, and that would have been the end of it. But as an “endowment” it will never be expended, but will (theoretically at least) continue to bless the university for ever – without depleting itself, and without diminishing its power to give.

When we speak of receiving blessings from God, we usually speak of them as gifts. That is, we speak of blessings that come to us as a long or short term event, such as healing the sick, helping one to overcome a personal crisis, or helping one to find a home, a job, or a friend. These gifts from the Lord are important. They frequently have long term value, just as a tree planted with a gift of money will have long term value. But they are not an endowment, in that they do not perpetuate themselves. For example, a blessing to be healed may remove the immediate problem of an injury or a disease, but it does not eliminate the problems of all future injuries and illnesses.

However, the scriptures do speak of blessings which are so large that they are self-perpetuating. Some are universal, while others are specific to the individual. The overriding universal one is the atonement of Christ. Just one facet of the atonement will show what I mean. Because of the Saviour’s sacrifice we can repent – not just once, but as often as we need to. Thus, the atonement is not a “gift,” but is a universal “endowment.”

Individual “endowments” are also mentioned in the scriptures. All of these are rooted in our premortal existence, where blessings were given to individuals, and the fruits of those blessings are realized in this world. A foreordination is an example of such a blessing. In the first chapter of Ephesians, Paul assures the Saints that as the Lord had given them assignments “before the foundation of the world,” and as they had accepted those assignments by covenant, the Lord’s part of that covenant was that he would bless the person while on earth so that person could fulfill the assignment. Thus, while we live in this world, the blessing of that premortal covenant remains intact (is not a “gift” or one-time blessing which can be used up). That covenant, on the part of the Father, has become the perpetual source of one’s blessings in this life, as one keeps the covenants made before coming to this world. Thus, the covenanted blessings associated with the assignments one received before coming here, are an endowment of blessing, inspiration, and strength while one is here.

But here, in this world, we walk on in darkness, and do not remember our covenants or the promised blessings, so we must be reminded. The reminder comes in two parts. The first is a reaffirmation of who we are. This is given by explaining where we came from, why we are here, and what blessings await our righteousness. The temple experience which we call an “endowment” provides that kind of eternal orientation. The second reminder also occurs in the temple. It gives us a fundamental understanding of what those covenants were, are, and will

always be. It renews the promises of blessings we may now receive, and the blessings we will yet receive, if we are faithful to those covenants. The temple experience is not a “gift” to be expended each time we go to the temple. It is an “endowment” – an eternal source of blessings -- an ever renewing reminder of the power, goodness, and mercy of our Saviour. It is a remembering of our relationship with our Father in Heaven and his children. And it is a promise of the perpetuation of the blessings of those eternal relationships.

Thus, the L.D.S. temple service is, in face, an endowment.