



Dr. Marcus H. Martins

Seals and the Sealing by the Holy Spirit of Promise Marcus H. Martins, Ph.D.

Question: “My question is about the sealing power of the priesthood. I have heard that the only blessing given by the priesthood holders outside of the temple that bears the seal of the priesthood is the Patriarchal Blessing. In the temple, we have the Sealers—my late father was a Sealer and an ordained Patriarch—who perform the sealing ordinances whose blessings are realized by the faithfulness of the recipient, just as with the Patriarchal Blessing.

“When we administer to the sick, in the second part we say that we are sealing the anointing made by the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Is there any difference between the sealing of a blessing given by a Patriarch, and the one by the temple sealer, and the one by an Elder when administering to the sick?

“We see Priesthood holders who in any situation in which they are called to give blessings—for comfort, paternal, callings, or administering to the sick—before they finish they say, ‘I seal these blessings in the name of Jesus Christ’. This sounds a little strange to me. Although I have the priesthood, I have not received the sealing power of the priesthood like patriarchs and sealers.

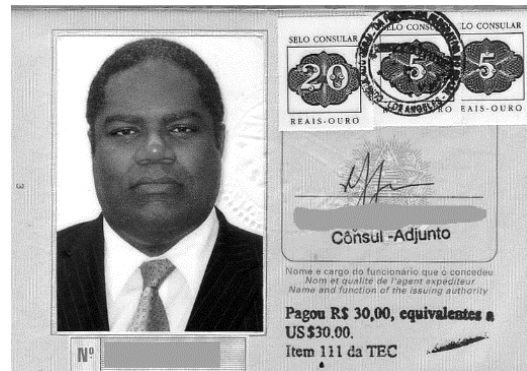
“Could you help me with this question?”

The following is an edited version of my original answer

Excellent question.

Let’s get right to the point. First, let’s define what a “seal” is, also known as a “signet”.

A seal is an official symbol or “fixed text” used to make official, authenticate, validate, ratify or confirm a document or an action. In the picture I am posting here, we see a page from one of my old Brazilian passports. We observe the different seals used to officialize, authenticate, and confirm the passport. The seals (1) officialize the document (the National Seal of Brazil and the National Coat of Arms, on the background); (2) authenticate its issue (the stamp and signature of the consular officer); and (3) confirm that the requirements for issuing it have been met (the stamp and consular seals stating the amount paid for issuing it, and again the National Seal confirming that the consular seals are official).



Seals have been used for such purposes since antiquity. Archaeologists understand that the use of seals or signets reveal the presence of organized societies, with governments and institutions structured through laws and regulations.

In the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, we learn that seals are integral parts of priesthood government in the kingdom of heaven. The Lord revealed the following to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

“All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time

and for all eternity, and that too most holy ... are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead.” (Doctrine & Covenants 132:7)

Here we understand that any official act which we perform in the divine work of salvation and exaltation, through the power and authority of the priesthood, must be made official, authenticated (or validated), and confirmed. We call this officialization, validation, and confirmation of “Sealing by the Holy Spirit of Promise,” and the Holy Ghost is the member of the Godhead in charge of this function of officializing, authenticating, and confirming our preaching and ordinances in the gospel of Jesus Christ, so they can produce the effects, or blessings, promised.

How do we get the Holy Ghost to officialize, authenticate, and confirm our preaching and ordinances? The Prophet Joseph Smith explained it as follows:

“It may seem to some to be a very bold doctrine that we talk of—a power which records or binds on earth and binds in heaven. Nevertheless, in all ages of the world, whenever the Lord has given a dispensation of the priesthood to any man by actual revelation, or any set of men, this power has always been given.

“Hence, whatsoever those men did in authority, in the name of the Lord, and did it truly and faithfully, and kept a proper and faithful record of the same, it became a law on earth and in heaven, and could not be annulled, according to the decrees of the great Jehovah.” (Doctrine & Covenants 128:9)

Great Joseph ...!

Let us consider the official priesthood ordinances of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as listed in the General Handbook of Instructions:

- Naming and blessing children
- Baptism
- Confirmation and receiving the Holy Ghost
- Administration of the Sacrament
- Consecration of oil
- Administering to the sick
- Conferral of the priesthood and ordinations to priesthood offices
- Setting apart and blessings for officers and teachers
- Blessings of comfort and counsel
- Father’s blessings
- Dedicating graves
- Patriarchal blessings

According to the Prophet Joseph Smith’s teaching, any preaching and any of these above-mentioned ordinances will be considered as official, authentic, and confirmed on earth and in heaven if three requirements are met:

1. The preaching or ordinance was performed with proper priesthood authority in the name of the Lord.
2. The preaching or ordinance was performed truthfully and faithfully (without falsehood, and following carefully the instructions of the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve—Manual 2, chapter 20).
3. A faithful and proper record of the preaching or ordinance is created and maintained.

So far, we have been focusing on priesthood ordinances of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that can be officiated by anyone, as long as that person has the proper priesthood authority.

Some of these ordinances require the prior approval of a Bishop: blessing children; confirmation and receiving the Holy Ghost; administration of the sacrament; conferral of the priesthood and ordinations to offices in the priesthood; setting apart and blessings for officers and teachers; and dedicating graves. Other ordinances may be officiated without prior authorization, as long as the priesthood holder is worthy: consecration of oil; administering to the sick; blessings of comfort and counsel; and father's blessings.

Other ordinances of the priesthood require special ordination or setting apart so that they may be officiated. I usually call such ordinances "ordinances of the kingdom," because their effects and promises are not limited only to mortality, as in the case of "ordinances of the Church."

A man must be ordained to the office of Patriarch in the Melchizedek Priesthood to be able to give patriarchal blessings to members of a stake. Men and women must be endowed with power from on high (D&C 95:7-9; 105:10-12), approved by their respective bishops and stake presidents, and then approved and set apart by a temple presidency, to officiate in ordinances of the House of the Lord. A man must be approved by the First Presidency to be set apart to officiate sealings of husbands and wives, and sealings of children to parents in the House of the Lord.

These "ordinances of the kingdom" are governed by the same laws that govern the "ordinances of the Church," that is, their effects are predicated on the faith and obedience of both the person officiating and the person receiving the ordinance. If the ordinance is performed with proper priesthood authority in the name of the Lord; truly and faithfully; having a faithful and proper record of the ordinance; and if the person who has received the ordinance remains faithful, the Holy Ghost will officialize, authenticate, and confirm such ordinance, and in the due time of the Lord the effects of the ordinance will become evident in the person's life.

Ok ... moral of the story:

1) We use the word "sealing" when we refer to the most sacred ordinances of the House of the Lord through which men and women and their children are united as couples and children for time and eternity by authority of the priesthood exercised by a sealer. Like all other ordinances, these sealings of couples and children also need to be officialized,

authenticated, and confirmed by the Holy Ghost, i.e. they must be sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise (D&C 132:7, 19).

2) We were instructed by the general leadership of the Church to use the word “seal” after anointing the sick (Handbook 2, edition 2010 - item 20.6.3). In that case, observe that only the anointing is being sealed, not the optional words of blessing, comfort, and counsel that the priesthood holder may have added to the ordinance.

3) And what about the other ordinances? As we read the Handbook we observe that none of the other ordinances of the priesthood require the use of the verb “to seal.” We have popularized the use of this verb on our own. I would not say that it is wrong to use the verb “seal” in these cases—I have used it myself countless times—but we can certainly say that it is completely unnecessary to do so. (I can imagine that after writing this essay I will think twice before using this verb in this way again.)

If we meet the requirements listed by the Prophet Joseph Smith (D&C 128:9), the Holy Ghost will do his part regardless of what we say or fail to say in that part of the ordinance in which we can add words of blessing according to the inspiration we have at the time. As long as what we say is true—doctrinally correct—and uttered by inspiration (D&C 68:2-6), not plagiarized, all will be well.

As we conclude an ordinance, we invoke the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ for that ordinance, and our faith in him will suffice to receive the effect (the blessings) of the ordinance in the Lord’s due time. Let us remember here that the greatest invocation of power we utter in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is not when we say “I seal,” but rather when we declare that we are acting (praying, speaking, testifying, teaching, counseling, or officiating) “In the name of Jesus Christ.” This expression is sacred, and by its use we invoke (or claim) the divine power and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. We may say that the use of this expression allows our act to receive the merciful attention of the other members of the Godhead. Unfortunately, because it is a frequently used term, we run the risk of sometimes using it casually or hastily (e.g. “*namjeezchrysmen*”), and even inappropriately, in a humorous way.

Two priesthood ordinances use yet another even more meaningful sacred invocation--when the priesthood holder acts in the name of all the members of the Godhead: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. And we have another sacred invocation that includes an even greater expression of power. Unfortunately, often this other invocation is also pronounced hastily, perhaps even thoughtlessly. A haste to leave the temple can do that. But whoever has perceived what it really is, and has been able to discern its meaning, pronounces those words with calm, reverence, respect, and feeling—invoking, praying, for those blessings.

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