

LECTURE THE THIRD

go ye therefore twain

SUPPLEMENT

SELECTED WORKS OF THE RESTORATION
AND CONTEMPORARY LDS THEOLOGY

beauty for ashes

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J. REUBEN CLARK + 1953

You know, I believe that the Lord will help us. I believe if we go to him, he will give us wisdom, if we are living righteously. I believe he will answer our prayers. I believe that our Heavenly Father wants to save every one of his children. I do not think he intends to shut any of us off because of some slight transgression, some slight failure to observe some rule or regulation. There are the great elementals that we must observe, but he is not going to be captious about the lesser things.

I believe that his juridical concept of his dealings with his children could be expressed in this way: I believe that in his justice and mercy he will give us the maximum reward for our acts, give us all that he can give, and in the reverse, I believe that he will impose upon us the minimum penalty which it is possible for him to impose.

ORSON F. WHITNEY • 1953

Then came a marvelous manifestation, and admonition from a higher source, one impossible to ignore. It was a dream, or a vision in a dream, as I lay upon my bed in the little town of Columbia, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. I seemed to be in the Garden of Gethsemane, a witness of the Savior's agony. I saw Him as plainly as ever I have seen anyone. Standing behind a tree in the foreground, I beheld Jesus, with Peter, James and John, as they came through a little wicket gate at my right. Leaving the three Apostles there, after telling them to kneel and pray, the Son of God passed over to the other side, where He also knelt and prayed. It was the same prayer with which all Bible readers are familiar: "Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

As He prayed the tears streamed down His face, which was toward me. I was so moved at the sight that I also wept, out of pure sympathy. My whole heart went out to Him; I loved Him with all my soul, and longed to be with Him as I longed for nothing else.

Presently He arose and walked to where those Apostles were kneeling-- fast asleep! He shook them gently, awoke them, and in a tone of tender reproach, untinctured by the least show of anger or impatience, asked them plaintively if they could not watch with Him one hour. There He was, with the awful weight of the world's sins upon His shoulders, with the pangs of every man, woman and child shooting through His sensitive soul-- and they could not watch with Him one poor hour!

Returning to His place, He offered up the same prayer as before; then went back and again found them sleeping. Again He awoke them, readmonished them, and once more returned and prayed. Three times this occurred, until I was perfectly familiar with His appearance-- face, form and movements. He was of noble stature and majestic mien-- not at all the weak, effeminate being that some painters have portrayed; but the very God that He was and is, as meek and humble as a little child.

All at once the circumstances seemed to change, the scene remaining just the same. Instead of before, it was after the crucifixion, and the Savior, with the three Apostles, now stood together in a group at my left. They were about to depart and ascend into Heaven. I could endure it no longer. I ran from behind the tree, fell at His feet, clasped Him around the knees, and begged Him to take me with Him.

I shall never forget the kind and gentle manner in which He stooped, raised me up, and embraced me. It was so vivid, so real. I felt the very warmth of His body, as He held me in His arms and said in the tenderest tones: "No, my son, these have finished their work; they can go with me; but you must stay and finish yours." Still I clung to Him. Gazing up into His face-- for He was taller than I-- I besought Him fervently: "Well, promise me that I may come to you at the last." Smiling sweetly, He said, "That will depend entirely upon yourself." I awoke with a sob in my throat, and it was morning.

.... I saw the moral clearly. I have never thought of being an Apostle, nor of holding any other office in the Church, and it did not occur to me then. Yet I knew that these sleeping Apostles meant me. I was asleep at my post -- as any man is who, having been divinely appointed to do one thing, does another.

But from that hour, all was changed. I never was the same man again. I continued to write, but not to the neglect of the Lord's work. I held that first and foremost; all else was secondary.

nature of the mission of jesus

AMASA LYMAN • MARCH 16, 1862

Amasa Lyman served as a counselor to Joseph Smith in the First Presidency from 1843, and later entered into the Council of the Twelve. His Dundee speech, reproduced below, represents an extreme pole of thought, which Woodruff termed “the worst herry [sic] man can preach”—so extreme that continued promulgation of these doctrines led to his expulsion from the Council of Twelve and the Church. I am not even aware of any fundamentalist groups which hearken back to these teachings, which thus represent a dense historical trivium.

* * *

WE ARE TOLD that the Scriptures contain what is necessary and requisite for the salvation of humanity, and that the fullness of the Gospel contained in them was not revealed till Jesus came preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God. Considering it thus, the reflecting mind in a moment is troubled with this question—If it was necessary, when Jesus came into the world, that all the Gospel truth should be made known and sustained by all the power he had, and if it required that power for the proclamation of the Gospel and its ministration, that it should become a perfect to those who should believe it, what has been the condition of the many millions who have never had any understanding of it? What is to become of them? For if it was necessary at any one time to save men and women constituted as we are—if a knowledge of its principles was requisite to secure their salvation, does it not prove to us that it was and is necessary for every other person constituted as we are and sustaining the same relationship to God as we do. Now, from the light of the Gospel as it is revealed in the Scriptures of truth, and at the time when Jesus was its greatest exponent, we arrive at our conclusions that this being necessary at that time, it was always necessary,—that there never was a time when humanity did not need all that Jesus taught for the consummation of their exaltation and glory.

¶ Another of the difficulties which surround us in our efforts to arrive at a comprehension of the truth is that we suppose, under the influence of

our education, (and our suppositions are according to our education,) that the Gospel was not revealed in its fullness until the meridian of time, when Jesus came, the great herald of mercy and expositor of the Gospel to man. A little calm reflection will lead us to know that this conception is erroneous and at war with the purposes of God. “Well, if that is so,” you may say, “how are we to become satisfied of it?” By looking at the mission of Jesus and the gospel he came to preach, not from where we are, but, leaving the mists of tradition, (the fogs of error that becloud the minds of men here,) travel backward on the stream of time to the point when the purpose of man’s being as the child of earth was formed by God, and the Gospel had a formation suited to his constitutional wants and requirements. We will find, when it first became a purpose in the mind of our Father that man should live on the earth, the point we seek. If we possess any degree of imaginative power, let us go back to that point, that we may learn, by contemplating man as he appeared there, the nature of his constitution as it was determined by the purpose of God, what he was constituted for, and the nature of that Gospel that was there prepared to be revealed in the future for all humanity. “But were there men there?” Oh, yes. If no others were there, “the man Christ Jesus” was there; and others were with him too, for it is said, “The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” “Well, if men were there, what kind of men were they? and how were they constituted?” Why, just as we are. I do not say they were weak and sickly as we are, nor corrupt as degenerated man has become. They were not

the subjects of disease and pain, as we are; but they possessed the same constitution, with minds having the same properties as ours—possessing the same germs of greatness, influence, and power. Thus constituted, man was there, the subject of his Father's care and provision—the leading object, the primal object that moved the mind of the Father in the great enterprise of developing intellectual humanity upon the earth—of sending out His children here upon the earth, that they might return to Him clothed in a fadeless glory and exalted to majesty and power in those abodes of celestial bliss where they might drink of the cup of felicity drawn from an exhaustless fountain.

Man thus constituted was man for whom the Saviour was prepared—man who had never sinned—who had never perpetrated a wrong. For man thus pure and holy, thus unstained by guilt or wrong, pure as the Father who had given him his constitution, the Saviour was prepared and the Gospel was ordained. “But was it decreed, then, that Jesus should die to save men who were thus pure and holy?” No: it did not form any part of the purpose of God that he should die. “What, then, was he ordained to as a Savior?” Why, to be a Prophet, Priest, and King,—a preacher of the Gospel of the kingdom of God. “What! was he ordained there to officiate thus, when in the meridian of time he should travel among his brethren shrouded in mortality?” Why, yes. When he came into the world, he told the people that he came to do the will of his Father, and none other work had he to do than he had seen his Father doing. What was the work he came doing? Read the history of John the Baptist as he went preaching from place to place, and continue it down until the time when Herod shut him up in prison, so that he could not preach to the people any longer, and there you will find that Jesus followed his forerunner in the great work of human instruction—that he came preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God.⁸ Was it a part of his preaching to people that he came to pour out his life's blood—that in its crimson tide the guilt of a sin-stricken world might be washed away? Did he speak of his death as the object to which their thoughts and attention should be turned? Why, he told them to

cease from sinning and turn unto righteousness—to put evil and corruption from them and live in purity and holiness before God. What did he say to the poor unfortunate woman brought before him, when her hypocritical accusers slunk in guilty silence away before the majesty of his rebuke? “He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone!” Looking up and seeing her standing with downcast eyes, he said, “Go thy way and sin no more.” That was the lesson he inculcated to all—“Cease to do evil, learn to do well.” I wish you to remember this incident in the history of Jesus—to treasure up this little portion of the Scriptures in your minds. It will not be unwieldy, or troublesome to carry; and when you wish to see the principle upon which God designed to save mankind, you will see there, when you look at it, a truthful reflection of the principles upon which he purposed to exalt poor sinful humanity—of how man, whom you saw so pure and holy before he became a denizen of the earth, was to return to the scenes of hallowed felicity from whence he had come; not on the crimson tide of Emmanuel's blood poured forth on Calvary's mount, but by ceasing the perpetration of those wrongs which have brought misery, suffering, and death upon the family of man. This is the Gospel that was determined in yonder heavens before the foundations of earth were laid.

“But does not Scripture speak of Jesus as a ‘Lamb slain from the foundation of the world?’” “Why,” says one, “I supposed that it was predetermined before the world was that Jesus must die, and that naught but his blood could bring God's children back to the home from whence they had simply gone abroad for a time.” Is it said so in the scriptures? No. This is the inference we draw from the fact that we see humanity cursed with sin till we travel back beyond that time when sin brought misery and death upon the race. We contemplate them as having the black stain of wrong fixed upon them; and seeing them thus, we conceive this to be something that had its origin in the purposes of our Father, which caused it to be predetermined that Jesus must die, or man could never return back again to the bosom of his Father. What was necessary, before man transgressed, that he should be saved? Why, simply, that he

should be taught. The infant being, inhaling for the first time the free air of heaven with opening mind, simply needed to have principles of truth kept ceaselessly before it to lead from its undeveloped condition onward and upward to God. Instead of man's becoming the corrupt degraded being we now behold him, he only needed healthy, truthful, and pure elements of knowledge imparted to him continuously, as his enlarging capacity prepared him to receive them, in order to become all that he was constituted to become as the child of God. Without this, he could not reach the high destiny that was made attainable for him. Was a Gospel combining the elements of this instruction prepared that it might bring happiness, blessing, and eternal life to man? Yes. But did not this Gospel have associated with it, as a necessary pre-requisite for man's salvation, the death of Jesus? No; for if so, he failed to tell the people the true nature of the Gospel he preached and his mission among men, and the means by which eternal life was to be gained. He said it was eternal life to know God. He told this to men who were constituted to learn, who could receive not one lesson, but with minds constituted to receive knowledge eternally. This was the constitution of the human mind; and, for the benefit of men thus constituted, he said, when praying to the Father, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." This is what you and I need to know, that our worship may be acceptable to God as being first conducive to our happiness, enlightenment, and emancipation from the bonds of ignorance and death. Shall we, with all these reasons before our minds, arrive at any other conclusion other than that man was constituted to become possessed of knowledge, and the Gospel constituted of what would lead him to the acquirement of that knowledge. The Gospel is nowhere said to be constituted of the death of Jesus. Where shall we find in the record of his teachings anything that would sustain such an idea? Nowhere. We see him as he was revealed among humanity, and read the truths he taught, so far as they have been transmitted to us through an imperfect medium; and we can see that his life was devoted to the truth, if the light of heaven has

given to us any degree of understanding.

¶ What, then, was the nature of the mission of Jesus when he came into the world? Some may be startled, doubtless, at the idea that it was not necessary, as having been predetermined and designed by the purposes of the Father, that Jesus should die. Did it ever occur to you how the death of Jesus could effect intellectual humanity? Did you ever think of it? But that we may entertain no wrong reflection on this point, I will call your attention to a parable spoken by Jesus, as recorded in Matthew *xxi*, 33—39, expressive of the nature of his mission. He speaks of an individual who owned a vineyard, and let it out to certain husbandmen; and when the season came round, he sent his servants to receive the fruits of it, or collect the rent, as would be said now. He had let the vineyard, and he sent his servants down to receive that which was justly his from those in whose care it was. But these men cast the servants out—beat one, killed another, and stoned a third, and would not pay the rent. Other embassies were sent and treated in the same manner as the first. At last the master said, "I will send my son down to them. If they have abused my servants, they will not presume to abuse my son and heir." What did the master say he was sending the son down for? Simply to collect the rent—to be the same representative of the master's interests that the servants who preceded him were. How did the husbandmen receive the son? They said, This is the son and heir. If we can kill him and get him out of the way, then the inheritance will be our own, for there will be no heir to it. The result was, the son was killed the same as those who had been sent before him. If Jesus knew it was necessary that they should be killed, as a part of the mission they were sent to perform, he failed to say so. They were killed because of the wickedness and murderous designs of those to whom they were sent, and the purposes of the master in sending them were not then accomplished. If the rent had been faithfully and honestly paid, there would have been no wrong done, no murder committed. Why did they do this evil? —why commit the murders which stained their souls with guilt and crime? Because they followed after an evil thought, and, being seduced by corrupt reasoning,

concluded that they would reap some advantage if they could cast out those who were sent to them. These servants and this dear son were alike killed. The same procuring causes led to the same result in the one case as in the other. I wish you to have Jesus' own interpretation of his mission into the world. Jesus has shown how the servants and the son came, and how they were treated when they did come; but he never said it was necessary that they should die. That they did die is a sad fact. The mission of Jesus to the earth not only cost him poverty and misery, but it cost him his life. Now, when we look at this parable and consider, in connection with it, that eternal life is "to know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent," and that this knowledge alone can raise mankind from their misery and degradation to enjoy the blessings of salvation, we see clearly that the Gospel was prepared before the foundation of the world to educate men and lead them from their weakness and ignorance to knowledge, through which and by which alone they could become clothed with the habiliments of might and glory.

Men were all constituted alike to receive, understand, and acquire knowledge; and the great necessity with regard to the coming of Jesus was that man could not be redeemed and exalted without knowledge, which constitutes the Gospel "the power of God unto salvation," that would enable man thus enlightened to comprehend the purpose of his own existence, and the nature of his relationship to the Father. That human action would become rightly and properly directed under its influence, the Gospel was prepared, because the moment God entertained the design to exalt humanity to glory and immortality within himself, the provision of the means that were required to accomplish his designs became a necessity. If it had not been so, Jesus would never have been put in jeopardy, nor any of the Prophets and Apostles have suffered from cruelty and persecution; but the very salvation of man depending upon his becoming enlightened rendered it imperative that that which would bring the Gospel within his reach should be done. Thus Jesus, at the time of his manifestation on the earth, became the great expositor of the Gospel. If he had declared that it was his blood that would cleanse us from sin, we

would not have questioned it. "But does not the scripture say his blood cleanses from sin?" Why, yes. John speaks of "Him that loved the us and washed us from our sins in his own blood;" and if that was all we knew of John, we would be led to form our conclusions from that saying. But there are some other things to be considered concerning him before our thought ripens into conviction. He was one of those to whom Jesus said, when opening his mission, as they toiled with their nets on the blue waters of Palestine, that if they would come with him, he would make them fishers of men. Did he become obedient to that call? Yes. Then, as through his future life, he rendered a ready response to the voice of him whom he learned to love so dearly. He was one of those who were baptized for the remission of sins; he was taught of Jesus and was ordained by him as his Apostle to represent him when he was gone. Under the sound of the voice of Jesus, he learned those truths which he was to proclaim to the nations as Heaven's ambassador and representative, and, in learning them, learned their worth—their priceless value, and learned to govern himself and regulate his actions by them. This is the way John became cleansed from sin—by acting consistently with the truth he had learned, and doing no wrong, and not by the blood of Jesus in any other way applied. Do you see any connection between the shedding of the blood of Jesus and the regeneration of the great Apostle John, the friend of Jesus, who shared with him his sorrows and rejoiced under his teachings, the beloved disciple who had leaned in the fondness of his soul upon the breast of that Master he so dearly loved, and who, when he regarded his own salvation, could not take into account all it had cost and leave out the tragedy of Calvary. He had seen him whom he had traveled and lived with—whom he had learned to appreciate and love with the heart's fondest affections,—he had seen him in his sufferings and misery, and witnessed the excruciating agonies he endured in Gethsemane and on Calvary. Could he forget all this? No; the thoughts moved by the rising sympathy of the soul assumed consistency and form, and said, "Can I forget the cost of the proclamation that brought all that life and light to my soul which I enjoy—that said to the captive soul, 'Go

forth to life and glory and freedom,' and which cost the lifeblood of my brother and my God?" This was the estimate made in the mind of the Apostle when he calculated the cost of what had brought salvation to him. Yet it was by doing just as Jesus told the poor frail woman to do—"Go thy way and sin no more." It was thus, when John ceased to do sin, that he was cleansed from sin. I wish you to see and understand this, because I do not wish you in the future to bear record that I ever used an influence to lead humanity to believe that they could derive salvation, or a freedom from the consequences of sin, only by ceasing from sinning. I learn this from what I have learned of the Gospel.

Did Jesus go about seeking to procure his own death, that the world might benefit by it? No. Did he know that such would be his fate? Yes. Where did he learn that it would be so? Why, yonder in the heavens, before the foundation of the earth was laid, when the great scroll on which the records of humanity were written was spread out before him, and in the light of truth the history of humanity was read. It was known then that Jesus would thus die, that the wickedness and evil passions of mankind would cause his death. Then he was known as the "Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world." He could not be known in any other character, because his mission was to lead him where men were vile and wicked—men who could believe they could gain some advantage by slaying the Son as they had slain the servants who preceded him. What I find fault with is that when we are told the blood of Jesus will cleanse us from all sin, without any effort on our part to do right, it is virtually a proclamation to us that we can do nothing for ourselves; and then we will sit down supinely waiting for the blood of Jesus to free us from the consequences of the wrongs we are committing—for the work that God has done or will do to take effect, when we are the authors of the wrongs that exist. It is you and I who do wrong, and from that wrong we want to be saved. How can we be saved from it but by ceasing to do the wrong? Did Jesus say the wicked who continue to do wrong shall be saved? No. With all the power he possessed as the Son of God, and with all the glory he was heir to, he

could not save the sinner in his sins. He could only bless those who hearkened to the truth he taught and ceased to do wrong. Listen to his language when he looked upon the city where prophets had raised their warning voice again and again:—"O, Jerusalem! Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered you, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not!" If he had power, why did he weep over the city devoted to ruin? Why lament over its approaching desolation? Because its inhabitants would not listen to his offers of mercy. He reviewed how often Prophets had been sent to them and rejected, and how last of all the darling of the Father had been sent, whom they treated with contumely and bitter persecution; and yet he could not, with all the God-like charity and ability he possessed, save the unbelievers who still persisted in their iniquities. Who were saved? Why, those and those only who laid off their iniquities. They were the recipients of his mercy, and the only ones who could receive the blessings of the Gospel.

¶ I wish you to look upon this consistently, and reflect upon it. My remarks have not been made to insinuate any criticism upon the opinions of others, but I wish you to look upon them reasonably, because I wish to place before you an incentive to practice virtue, cultivate charity, and live lives of truthfulness. I would be as glad as any one if I could believe and understand that my salvation was sure simply because Jesus had died. What would there be to hinder me from being happy? But I cannot believe it, and I will show you a reason why. I cannot believe it, because, if I am a liar, there cannot be people enough in the world leave off lying to constitute me a truthful man. Suppose I were to profess religion, and day after day continued lying, what would I be? Why, I should be a liar! Although numbered among a congregation of so-called believers, and consequently one of those taught to look forward to salvation as the reward of those who simply believe in Jesus, which they blindly suppose they do by adopting the false opinions of their teachers. If there is any one thing in the wide region of delusion more soul-destroying than another, it is this. What difference does it make to me, though I thus believe? I am a mean man, a false man, because I am a liar; con-

sequently, an impure man. Yet by this false religion I am taught, with all that impunity and falsehood clinging around me, and without one effort to cast it off, to aspire to a seat in the mansions of perfect purity, where God reigns! "But," says one, "we must forsake our wrongs in order for the blood of Jesus to cleanse us from our sins." This is all I ask you to do. When you cease from all wrongs, I do not care what you say has cleansed you from sin; but I do not want you to believe that the blood of Jesus has cleansed you from all sin, and yet see you going down to perdition because you have continued to sin. I want you to understand that by practicing purity continually, by being righteous and holy, honest with our God and with one another,—by this means we will avoid doing evil. All is embraced in that creed that calls upon us to love our neighbor [sic] as ourselves and devote our hearts to God:—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy might, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbor as thyself." You shall love your neighbor, the man and the woman with whom you associate as you love yourself. But who are your neighbors? All those people around us. Who acted the neighbor's part to the poor, beaten, wounded, and robbed traveler [sic] who lay by the wayside? The Samaritan who relived his wants, dressed his wounds, and cared for him with a brother's tenderness, or the Levite and Jew who passed by on the other side and left him to perish? Was not the Samaritan the best man as evinced by the discharge of the neighbor's duty to the poor sufferer? Who were the Samaritan, the Jew, and the wounded traveler? Why, simply so many of God's children, sent into the world for the same holy purpose. Why love your

neighbor as well as yourself? Because he is just as good as you are, descended from the same high parentage as the Saviour who came into the world that sinners might be saved and exalted. For whom did he die? For you and me, and not for our neighbor? No; but alike for us all. He did not command his Apostles to go and preach to a few for whom he died, but to go and preach to "every creature," saying, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." What would have been the utility or wisdom of extending their mission at all, of only a part could have been benefited by it? All were alike the objects of the Father's parental care, and were alike provided for, if they could only do that which Jesus could not do for them, and which you and I would blush to ask him to do. You could not ask him to cease lying for you, to avoid corruptions for you, to become godly, pure, holy, and righteous for you—a possession of the fulness of the principles which have exalted him to immortality and endless life. No. But if we practice the same principles, they will place us in a similar position of happiness and exaltation. You may ask God to help you and strengthen you; you may invoke his blessings to be ever round about you, and the genial influence of his Spirit is waiting to be with you, to bestow upon you the blessings you lack and desire to obtain. If you do not possess it, it is because you have not prepared a place for it to dwell with you. This is what I want you to see and understand; and that God may bless you and preserve you in your departure from doing wrong, in breaking off your sins by righteousness and your iniquities by turning unto God, is my prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Reported by E.L. Sloan.

the mediator

BOYD K. PACKER + APRIL 3, 1977

What I shall say I could say much better if we were alone, just the two of us. It would be easier also if we had come to know one another, and had that kind of trust which makes it possible to talk of serious, even sacred things.

If we were that close, because of the nature of what I shall say, I would study you carefully as I spoke. If there should be the slightest disinterest or distraction, the subject would quickly be changed to more ordinary things.

I have not, to my knowledge, in my ministry said anything more important. I intend to talk about the Lord, Jesus Christ, about what He really did—and why it matters now.

One may ask, “Aside from the influence He has had on society, what effect can He have on me individually?”

To answer that question I ask, have you ever been hard-pressed financially? Have you ever been confronted with an unexpected expense, a mortgage coming due, with really no idea how to pay it?

Such an experience, however unpleasant, can be, in the eternal scheme of things, very, very useful. If you miss that lesson you may have to make it up before you are spiritually mature, like a course that was missed or a test that was failed.

That may be what the Lord had in mind when He said,

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” (Matt. 19:24.)

Those who have faced a foreclosure know that one looks helplessly around, hoping for someone, anyone, to come to the rescue.

This lesson is so valuable because there is a spiritual account, with a balance kept and a settlement due, that no one of us will escape.

To understand this spiritual debt we must speak of such intangibles as love, faith, mercy, justice.

Although these virtues are both silent and invisible, surely I do not need to persuade you that they are real. We learn of them by processes that are often silent and invisible as well. .

We become so accustomed to learning through our physical senses—by sight and sound and smell, by taste and touch—that some of us seem to learn in no other way.

But there are spiritual things that are not registered that way at all. Some things we simply feel, not as we feel something we touch, but as we feel something we feel.

There are things, spiritual things, that are registered in our minds and recorded in our memories as pure knowledge. A knowledge of “things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass.” (D&C 88:79; see also D&C 93:24, and Jacob 4:13.)

As surely as we know about material things, we can come to know of spiritual things.

Each of us, without exception, one day will settle that spiritual account. We will, that day, face a judgment for our doings in mortal life and face a foreclosure of sorts.

One thing I know: we will be justly dealt with. Justice, the eternal law of justice, will be the measure against which we settle this account.

Justice is usually pictured holding a set of scales and blindfolded against the possibility that she may be partial or become sympathetic. There is no sympathy in justice alone—only justice! Our lives will be weighed on the scales of justice.

The Prophet Alma declared:

Justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God. (Alma 42:22.)

I commend to you the reading of the 42nd chapter of Alma. It reveals the place of justice and should confirm that the poet spoke the truth when he said, “In the course of justice [only,] none of us should see salvation.” (Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV. i. 199–200.)

Let me tell you a story—a parable.

There once was a man who wanted something very much. It seemed more important than anything else in his life. In order for him to have his desire, he incurred a great debt.

He had been warned about going into that much debt, and particularly about his creditor. But it seemed so important for him to do what he wanted to do and to have what he wanted right now. He was sure he could pay for it later.

So he signed a contract. He would pay it off some time along the way. He didn’t worry too much about it, for the due date seemed such a long time away. He had what he wanted now, and that was what seemed important.

The creditor was always somewhere in the back of his mind, and he made token payments now and again, thinking somehow that the day of reckoning really would never come.

But as it always does, the day came, and the contract fell due. The debt had not been fully paid. His creditor appeared and demanded payment in full.

Only then did he realize that his creditor not only had the power to repossess all that he owned, but the power to cast him into prison as well.

“I cannot pay you, for I have not the power to do so,” he confessed.

“Then,” said the creditor, “we will exercise the contract, take your possessions, and you shall go to prison. You agreed to that. It was your choice. You signed the contract, and now it must be enforced.”

“Can you not extend the time or forgive the debt?” the debtor begged. “Arrange some way for me to keep what I have and not go to prison. Surely you believe in mercy? Will you not show mercy?”

The creditor replied, “Mercy is always so one-sided. It would serve only you. If I show mercy to you, it will leave me unpaid. It is justice I demand. Do you believe in justice?”

“I believed in justice when I signed the contract,” the debtor said. “It was on my side then, for I thought it would protect me. I did not need mercy then, nor think I should need it ever. Justice, I thought, would serve both of us equally as well.”

“It is justice that demands that you pay the contract or suffer the penalty,” the creditor replied. “That

is the law. You have agreed to it and that is the way it must be. Mercy cannot rob justice.”

There they were: One meting out justice, the other pleading for mercy. Neither could prevail except at the expense of the other.

“If you do not forgive the debt there will be no mercy,” the debtor pleaded.

“If I do, there will be no justice,” was the reply.

Both laws, it seemed, could not be served. They are two eternal ideals that appear to contradict one another. Is there no way for justice to be fully served, and mercy also?

There is a way! The law of justice can be fully satisfied and mercy can be fully extended—but it takes someone else. And so it happened this time.

The debtor had a friend. He came to help. He knew the debtor well. He knew him to be shortsighted. He thought him foolish to have gotten himself into such a predicament. Nevertheless, he wanted to help because he loved him. He stepped between them, faced the creditor, and made this offer.

“I will pay the debt if you will free the debtor from his contract so that he may keep his possessions and not go to prison.”

As the creditor was pondering the offer, the mediator added, “You demanded justice. Though he cannot pay you, I will do so. You will have been justly dealt with and can ask no more. It would not be just.”

And so the creditor agreed.

The mediator turned then to the debtor. “If I pay your debt, will you accept me as your creditor?”

“Oh yes, yes,” cried the debtor. “You save me from prison and show mercy to me.”

“Then,” said the benefactor, “you will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible. I will provide a way. You need not go to prison.”

And so it was that the creditor was paid in full. He had been justly dealt with. No contract had been broken. The debtor, in turn, had been extended mercy. Both laws stood fulfilled. Because there was a mediator, justice had claimed its full share, and mercy was fully satisfied.

Each of us lives on a kind of spiritual credit. One day the account will be closed, a settlement demanded. However casually we may view it now, when that day comes and the foreclosure is imminent, we will look around in restless agony for someone, anyone, to help us.

And, by eternal law, mercy cannot be extended save there be one who is both willing and able to assume our debt and pay the price and arrange the terms for our redemption.

Unless there is a mediator, unless we have a friend, the full weight of justice untempered, unsympathetic, must, positively must fall on us. The full recompense for every transgression, however minor or however deep, will be exacted from us to the uttermost farthing.

But know this: Truth, glorious truth, proclaims there is such a Mediator.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 2:5.)

Through Him mercy can be fully extended to each of us without offending the eternal law of justice.

This truth is the very root of Christian doctrine. You may know much about the gospel as it branches out from there, but if you only know the branches and those branches do not touch that root, if they

have been cut free from that truth, there will be no life nor substance nor redemption in them.

The extension of mercy will not be automatic. It will be through covenant with Him. It will be on His terms, His generous terms, which include, as an absolute essential, baptism by immersion for the remission of sins.

All mankind can be protected by the law of justice, and at once each of us individually may be extended the redeeming and healing blessing of mercy.

A knowledge of what I am talking about is of a very practical value. It is very useful and very helpful personally; it opens the way for each of us to keep his spiritual accounts paid up.

You, perhaps, are among those troubled people. When you come face to face with yourself in those moments of quiet contemplation—that many of us try to avoid—are there some unsettled things that bother you?

Do you have something on your conscience? Are you still, to one degree or another, guilty of anything small or large?

We often try to solve guilt problems by telling one another that they don't matter. But somehow, deep inside, we don't believe one another. Nor do we believe ourselves if we say it. We know better. They do matter!

Our transgressions are all added to our account, and one day if it is not properly settled, each of us, like Belshazzar of Babylon, will be weighed in the balance and found wanting.

There is a Redeemer, a Mediator, who stands both willing and able to appease the demands of justice and extend mercy to those who are penitent, for "He offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered." (2 Ne. 2:7.)

Already He has accomplished the redemption of all mankind from mortal death; resurrection is extended to all without condition.

He also makes possible redemption from the second death, which is the spiritual death, which is separation from the presence of our Heavenly Father. This redemption can come only to those who are clean, for no unclean thing can dwell in the presence of God.

If justice decrees that we are not eligible because of our transgression, mercy provides a probation, a penitence, a preparation to enter in.

I have carried with me a great desire to bear testimony of the Lord, Jesus Christ. I have yearned to tell you in as simple terms as I can, what He did, and who He is.

Although I know how poor mere words can be, I know also that such feelings are often carried by the spirit, even without words.

At times I struggle under the burden of imperfections. Nevertheless, because I know that He lives, there is a supreme recurring happiness and joy.

There is one place where I am particularly vulnerable—when I know that I have abused someone, or caused them hurt, or offended them. It is then I know what agony is.

How sweet it is, on those occasions, to be reassured that He lives, and to have my witness reaffirmed. I want, with fervent desire, to show you how our burdens of disappointment, sin, and guilt can be laid before Him, and on His generous terms have each item on the account marked, "Paid in Full."

I claim with my brethren of the Twelve to be a special witness of Him. My witness, and theirs, is true.
I love the Lord, and I love the Father who sent Him.

Eliza R. Snow, with deep spiritual inspiration, wrote these words, with which I close.

How great the wisdom and the love
That filled the courts on high
And sent the Savior from above
To suffer, bleed, and die!
His precious blood He freely spilt;
His life He freely gave,
A sinless sacrifice for guilt,
A dying world to save.
How great, how glorious, how complete,
Redemption's grand design,
Where justice, love, and mercy meet
In harmony divine!
(*Hymns*, no. 68.)

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

what is the heart of the atonement?

JEFFREY R. HOLLAND • AUGUST 1980

It is an emotional time for me. I'm tired and nostalgic and deeply grateful. I'm conscious that this is the last time I will address you in my former capacity as Commissioner (of the CES). And I'm very mindful today of the blessings of the Lord to me. I've needed His help as much these last few weeks as I've ever needed Him, and yesterday maybe unlike any day I've ever known. I'm mindful of what it means to host the President of the Church, and to be what you ought to be with the people you love and admire most in this world. I include in that day's humility this day's humility, because in a very real way, I feel the same about hosting you here.

*I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me,
Confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me.
I tremble to know that for me he was crucified,
That for me, a sinner, he suffered, he bled and died.*

I don't know what kind of madness would possess a man to believe he could talk about the atonement. I don't know what kind of arrogance or senility would allow you to accept the assignment. Someday maybe we'll have a symposium on the atonement. Not an hour at the end, rushing for airplanes. And maybe we'll hold it in the temple. And maybe we'll come with clean hands and a pure heart. I look forward to that time with you; and in the meantime, accept the invitation to do what little I can.

This invitation came just about five days before my appointment. I accepted it reluctantly then, but I had honest intentions. I've been reading about the Master; I had been that spring. And against my better judgment (for anyone does feel unequal to the task, and I really do), I accepted it. I've not hated to do it for what it's meant to me, but I struggle when, whatever the course, we get to the point where I have to talk about these gifts to us. Again, I don't know what would allow you to think you could do it in a symposium. But I had been reading, and I had been thinking, and I had been feeling. And I wanted to do something just selfishly. I supposed then, and now, that it would be a failure to you. But I thought it could nudge me a little closer, and I need that; I want that; and I accepted.

I had intentions of being away for a month this summer. Ho, ho, ho. I thought I was going to be away for a month this summer and I had made some arrangements to be literally away. Secluded away...from mail and telephones and almost all people. I was going to read and write about this subject. I have things that eat at my soul about it, and I wanted to do that. That has not been my privilege, come four or five days later. I do not have a written text. I'm not sure there will be any way that we can share this with you. I'm confident it will not come out on tape in a way that is graceful or appropriate or dignified. I have some feelings, I have some notes. I come to you on the heels of a first commencement and reception for a former president, and significant messages yesterday, and I pray you will take me as I am.

I really have one thought. It has some attendant implications and it meanders a bit. But I see it as one thought about the atonement. It is certainly not a definitive statement about the mission of Christ in our lives. It is one small ingredient that I share with you, as simple as it is; and then look forward to learning at your feet in the years ahead about what all of this really means. Maybe when

we're older and wiser and cleaner, we'll know more about it.

I ask you to pursue with me one thought. It's the toughest part of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as I suppose sacrifice is. It is the thing that Christ has asked us to do, and it's related to the atonement, and it seems to me hardest of all the commandments. At the beginning of His ministry, it comes in the form of the lines that say,

*Love your enemies,
bless them that curse you,
do good to them that hate you,
and pray for them that despitefully use you
and persecute you.*

You know those lines from the fifth chapter of Matthew. It comes in the same form, more or less, at the end of His life when taken to Calvary. And fainting under the burden of His cross, and having paid those great prices to which we will allude, He then feels His flesh open and His blood running, by carefree, capricious, whimsical, jovial Roman soldiers, with attendant carefree, capricious, whimsical, jovial, blasphemous neighbors and friends and family standing by. When that flesh is opened and when that blood runs (I guess in the most tragically unjust moment in the history of this planet, in the thing above all other things that never should have happened, at least on the surface, at least in terms of cause given and life lived) when His is prepared for that cross, He says, "Father, forgive them."

Now I come to you today saying, "I don't know how you do that." I don't know how to do good to those who hate me. I don't know how to bless those that curse me. I think I'm not particularly guilty of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,' necessarily. That is, I may not curse those that curse me. Or, as Paul said later, to feed my enemy when he's hungry and to give him drink when he's thirsty (Romans 12:20-21). And yet here in this culminating moment of this majestic life, from start to finish of one piece, it is consistent from birth to death; in this moment of greatest tragedy and deepest injustice, at the time when a fist could shake and the heavens could rend and the legions of angels could come and set unrighteousness right, and injustice just, and unkindness kind, at that moment, He says, "No. Just stay where you are. It's okay. Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

I submit to you, that is the story of our lives. That neither do we, that as good as we think we are, and even as righteous as we want to be, that somehow, hourly, daily, eternally, this Advocate with the Father, this Mediator in our legal entanglements and deep transgressions, says over and over again, "Oh, Father, forgive them. He isn't much. We've tried him in a half dozen jobs. He can't stay, he worries about whether the wallpaper is the right color, and if the potted plants will be there for commencement. Just forgive him, for he knows not what he does." As I understand it, that is at the heart of the atonement. The reason I say it is so majestic at that moment is because that's the time when I couldn't have done it. And I'm guessing that maybe some of you would have had trouble.

But for Him not to have done it, for Him to have fallen or failed or rescinded or retreated, for Him to have done that would have obviously been exactly what Satan would have: you and I firmly in his grasp but never Him. That's what would have destroyed the plan. That's what would have made a lie of everything He said from those earliest hours to this last one.

*'Yea, I want you to love your enemies, except when it's really hard to.
And bless them that curse you, if the names are just sort of relatively rude.
Do good to them that hate you, if there is some reasonable chance that it will accrue to your good later on.
Pray for them that despitefully use you, if the inspiration of the moment seems to call for it.'*

None of that. None of the qualifications. Indeed, the only qualification of the Lord's Prayer (if I read it the way I think I read it) with all of those blessings, and all of those requests, the only element in that prayer that has a qualification is the matter of forgiveness.

I'm suggesting to you, that from Adam to the end of the world, He has come to forgive you and to forgive me; to descend from His throne divine, and that some attendant responsibility then falls on you and on me. With that much introduction, let me just trace it very quickly and we'll be through.

And Adam and Eve, his wife, called upon the name of the Lord, and they heard the voice of the Lord from the way toward the Garden of Eden, speaking unto them, and they saw him not; for they were shut out from his presence.

And he gave unto them commandments, that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord. And Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord.

And after many days an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, save the Lord commanded me.

And then the angel spake, saying: This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth. (Moses 5:4-7)

You all know those lines. I'm not sure yet we've understood the significance of them. They seem to me more exciting every year of my life, but that's another story for another day.

Adam, in what you and I are so reluctant to call 'blind obedience,' (such a thing almost chokes us; who should ever dare do anything that they don't fully understand? after all, we are bright and reasonable and wonderful people) says, "I know not" to the question of "Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord?" He says, "I know not, save the Lord commanded me." Then the angel said, "This thing is a similitude." It is a type. It is a foreshadow. It is a symbol. It is an example. It is a forerunner. It is a precursor. It is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father which is full of grace and truth. I'm suggesting those are the lines we know best and quote most often. I'm just asking you to continue to quote the next line:

Wherefore, thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.

Call upon God for what? A social visit? Is this a home teaching suggestion? Is it a casual backfence greeting? What does it mean to call upon God, and for what? I don't know how you read that passage, but in the context of Adam's plight, and the commandment of God to offer sacrifices in similitude of the Son, and then this injunction: Repent! Thou shalt call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore. I'm suggesting that the commandment to you and to me, from Adam to the end of our lives, or the end of this world, whichever comes first, that the commandment from God to us, to all mankind, is to cry out to God for forgiveness; that the issue here is forgiveness.

There is nothing very profound about that. It hardly could be when the language says repent and call upon God. There is this little reminder in the background: these little rocks heaped up, and prayers given, and ultimately the blood of a lamb. Now that's supposed to be a reminder. Indeed Isaiah would then pick up and give us the language to suggest that we are in this indebted state. We are probationary. We do have to be childlike and humble and submissive. And we need to be forgiven. We need to be reconciled. I am talking today, in this one thought to you, about reconciliation, about unity among people, among husbands, among wives, among children; between father and son, and

mother and daughter; between loved one and enemy; between those that bless you and those that curse you; among all the family of man and the fatherhood of God. I'm just talking in any way I know how to talk about it: about reconciliation, about unity, about at-one-ment. At the heart of that is forgiveness. Your forgiveness, my forgiveness, God's forgiveness of us, your forgiveness of me, and my forgiveness of you. The image was to be a little lamb. Isaiah tells us about them both.

One reason, of course, is that He will be the Lamb of God.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he opened not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgressions of my people was he stricken. (Mosiah 14:7-8)

Submissive. Meek. Mild. Quiet. Literally standing before Pilate and Caiaphas and Annas and his accusers, everyone but Herod, silent, lamblike. For the transgressions of my people was he stricken. But the other image of the lamb is also given us by Isaiah, and we must not forget it. For,

All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all. (Mosiah 14:6)

Blind. Ignorant. Childlike (too childish). Wandering. Straying. Transgressing. Needing help. Cut off. Lost. Removed. Trapped. Forsaken.

And the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquities of us all.

From Adam through the Mosaic code, this little ritual of offering this little animal on these little rocks, and trying to remember these things were all given in an attempt to reinforce the commandment to repent, to call upon God for forgiveness. There were certain qualities of life that were to be implicit in that repentance. They were mercy, forgiveness, charity, remorse, kindness, longsuffering. Because the theory was—and it finally turned out to only be a theory, because it never seemed to work for anybody—but the theory was, that we would be so mindful of our need, we would be so mindful of our Adamic plight, cut off from the presence of God and needing a way to get back, that of course we would be forgiving. Of course we would be kind and loving and longsuffering and charitable and good. We'd be that way with each other because we had to be that way with God. And we were certainly hoping He would be that way with us. But it didn't work that way for the most part. We have these wonderful isolated examples, but for the most part, dispensation after dispensation, it did not work.

A fine man, a high priest, would teach his morning seminary class, and remember that is was the hour of sacrifice, and go up to the altar and offer his lamb and come down and scream at his wife and kick his kids and say, "I fulfilled my obligation. I stand before God with my altar clean and my lambs at the ready." And God in His heaven surely must have wept and shook His head one more time.

Samuel sends Saul to Amalek and says, "Destroy the land and remove it from the curse that it's under."

And Saul says, "Well, I've got a better idea. Let's keep a few sheep. Perfectly good sheep. And by the way, they'd make wonderful sacrificial lambs."

And Samuel, out of the anguish of his heart, said, "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22).

And God cries out to Hosea, “O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away” (Hosea 6:4).

By about 10:00 it’s all over. Sun’s out. Problems come. Pain is there. People curse. People hate. And so much for the morning sacrifice.

“I desire mercy,” says Jehovah, “not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). “I am not really interested in dead little animals, but you somehow seem to forget the meaning behind the meaning; when I really wanted knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. Don’t sing. Don’t dance. Don’t do any more than you’re doing. You have not understood.”

To the Nephites, He would then say, “And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy” (Alma 34:15).

And the God of heaven and earth and of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob says, “Where is it? For all of you down there stacking your stones, one on top of another, and putting a knife to the lamb, and putting a match to the fat, where is all this mercy we were talking about?”

Is there any kindness and love unfeigned? I’m not implying there wasn’t any, but collectively, speaking in any broad-based human way, where was it?

O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.

Joseph Smith said about Cain’s problem, “Certainly the shedding of the blood of the beast could be beneficial to no man except it was done in imitation or as a type... (remember the similitude, the language of the angel)...except it was done in imitation or as a type or an explanation of what was to be offered through the gift of God Himself.”

This performance, done with an eye looking forward in faith on the power of that great sacrifice for a remission of sins, and implied in that plea for forgiveness, is this great willingness to humble ourselves, get down on our knees, to be forgiving of each other, and forgiving of ourselves, and kind, and charitable, and responsive, and lamblike. The Prophet Joseph said Cain didn’t understand that, and a lot of other people since haven’t. But Cain was the first one who didn’t understand it. First generation; it doesn’t take very long.

Father and mother come back from this little instruction, and Cain says, “You can have these tomatoes and bananas, but I’m not going to offer any lambs. I don’t have a lamb. I keep these other things, and they are going to have to be good enough.”

And the Lord patiently says, “It isn’t the tomatoes and the bananas. It isn’t even the lambs. What I need, Cain, is submissiveness and obedience. And in this case, symbolic remembrance of my gift.”

Cain says, “That’s tough. You can have these tomatoes and that banana, or forget it.”

And he did not understand that tomatoes and a banana would not bleed and die for him. He didn’t understand that a lamb, going like a sheep to the shearer, would silently, sweetly, respectfully, bear Cain’s stripes and shoulder his burdens. You know what came of Cain. The danger is that some portion of that is what can come to so many of the rest of the human family—I suppose, including us—if we do not understand any better.

For four millennia or so, that lesson was taught and attempted. Some practice was pursued, but always with the hope that the real meaning would come through: that it isn’t the little animals, it

isn't the smoke from the offering.

Finally, there was a time when it was fulfilled:

*I am the light and the life of the world.
I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.
And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood;
yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away,
for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings.
And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me
a broken heart and a contrite spirit. (3 Nephi 9:18-20)*

Let's just forget the altar for now; at least the stone altar you used to put up on the hillside. Keep the lambs home and just milk the goats. And let's try another one.

With the great ultimate sacrifice, the cessation in the meridian of time of the shedding of blood, Christ now says, "Let's try a new sacrifice. The meaning is the same. The meaning from the Garden of Eden, through all time, is the same. But I will ask you now to put it in a different form. Rather than the lamb and the fat and the fire, I now ask for a broken heart and a contrite spirit."

That, of course, was given to the Nephites, and then reiterated in the 59th section in our own dispensation. So we're still very much under the obligation of sacrifice with all of its attendant symbolism, the symbolism not quite as conspicuous. You don't have blood running down the side of some stones to remind you. But then, it wasn't a very good reminder anyway. Nobody seemed to catch the picture.

The symbolism here will be a little harder to get, but anybody ought to be able to understand a broken heart, particularly if they read the scriptures and know that is indeed why He died.

The point still being, "As I wanted you to be like me then, or as I wanted you to be like the lamb of God then, so I still want you to be like the Lamb of God."

Care for the sins of the world. Hurt a little. If the broken heart is hyperbole, if it isn't really intended that we die of a broken heart as He did, (just the rupturing of the whole cardiac chamber, just whatever chambers and valves there were, I guess, were broken...I don't know how to talk about that, to say it in a way that sounds anything more than the weather report, or this morning's news) but if, indeed, that is what He did, then some portion of that, in its attendant, symbolic way, like the little lamb on the rocks, is incumbent upon us.

Do we hurt for the sins of the world? Does our heart really ache? Oh, if it comes close to home. If it's our children, or maybe somebody in the class we really know and care about. There aren't a lot of us who are on the verge of chambers that will burst. We hardly even run a fever over many of the sins we hear, and many of the sins we see, and many of the sins we commit. And yet, we're asked in the same spirit that Adam was asked, to offer a broken heart for His sacrifice. For our identification with His sacrifice: a contrite spirit. Contrition. That is simply the spiritual aspect of a physical implication. They are the same. We are being asked to bear sins, to somehow feel responsibility, to shoulder it, to do something about, to get rid of it, to handle it, to take care of it, to dispose of it, to confront it, to do something with it. The broken heart is the physical imagery of His gift, and the contrite spirit is the spiritual implication, but it's still the same. It's still the same for you and for me.

We are to come to feel the sins of others. Surely it goes without saying, I suppose, that we're supposed to come to feel our own sins. We are, above all, to remember. That's the key word, the repeated word in our sacramental prayers. You've all done this, but just compare the blessing on the

water with the blessing on the bread. The blessing on the bread is slightly more detailed. Because we've heard it there, and I suppose we're supposed to understand it when we get to the blessing on the water, the plea, without reiterating taking His name and keeping His commandments and some other obligations we have, the key, finally, is just to remember...to remember Him always.

Chances are, if we could do that, chances are, if Cain could have done it, chances are, if Ephraim and Judah could have done it, then world history would have been quite a different course. But surely it will be for us. Our world will be a different course if we can remember. The plea from the summit of Sinai is to remember. Please, please, remember. And then, if you remember who He is, and what you are, and where we've been, and what we've done, you and I will have no inclination to be curt and unkind and merciless and charging with the fist of vengeance and justice. Justice is His. Forgiveness is our responsibility. Patience. Brotherly kindness. The virtues of a Christlike soul. The characteristics of the divine nature, to use Peter's phrase.

We are to come to Him with a broken heart and a contrite spirit for our own sins, and for the sins of others, and through it all to remember Him always. Then we will have grasped the symbolism of a broken heart and a contrite spirit; of the little lamb offered silently and without remorse and without crying out, "I am not guilty. I am not the guilty one here. This should not be done to me. Why are you cursing me? And why are you an enemy to me, when I am the one man in all the world who's not created an enemy, and not said an unkind thing?" None of that is expressed. The burden is borne. The stripes are taken and the afflictions are borne.

Then He turns to us and says, "What portion of this can you do likewise? Is there anything here that you can handle? Can you, in some way, be like me and remember and remember and remember?"

Mercy, which we need, is supposed to be the inspiration for forgiveness, our forgiveness for others. It is certainly God's forgiveness of us. If the mercy we need and the mercy that every other man, woman, and child past the age of eight needs in this human history...if mercy is the inspiration for that forgiveness...and forgiveness is from Adam's lesson and the angel's description to our own 9th chapter of 3 Nephi and 59th section of the Doctrine and Covenants...if forgiveness is then the central meaning of sacrifice, that is, we are to call upon God over this altar to ask for forgiveness of our sins, then sacrifice indeed becomes the ultimate act in the atonement.

That goes without saying for anyone who has heard the music Norma played and remembered, literally or figuratively, those scenes of that sacrifice. The atonement, then, is reconciliation. What was lost, trapped, forsaken, separate, is found and renewed and restored and united. We leap from a merciful, Christlike life to the reconciliation that He Himself prayed for throughout the course of His mortal ministry; and, so far as I know, is pleading that we pray for now.

Let me share one concluding thought about this and suggest a problem that it poses. I want to suggest to you that this relationship with other people, this relationship with each other, with your husband and wife, and your children, is your great chance to say what you want to say about the atonement. What you believe about the atonement is not going to be said in a classroom. For me, it certainly isn't going to be said in a symposium. What you will say about your understanding of the atonement will come in your human relationships with other people who have problems, with other people who are, if not sinful, at least unfortunate, who make mistakes, who haven't every day of every year and in every hour done all that he or she could have done. You know I'm describing you and me. There is a burden there. The burden of sin. And this is the cry from Paul to the Galatians:

Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

And at the waters of Mormon, in that first great bishop's interview about whether you will or will not understand baptism in these waters, in the 18th chapter of Mosiah,

Bear one another's burdens that they may be light.

If I've offended you, I'm your burden. If I have done something wrong to you, if I have spoken despitely of you, if I've hated you or cursed you, I'm your burden and you're mine. I'm your burden because I've hurt you. You are not as happy as you were. You are not as spiritual as you were. You think about me and you get mad. You go in and burn the beans and kick the pots and pans, and you're less than you were, because I did something to you. You're my burden because you can keep me out of the kingdom.

I get there, should I be fortunate enough to pass by those gates, and there's a little interview going on.

And the Lord says, "Has everything been worked out? If you had some problems, did you get them taken care of? Is the slate clean?"

And you cry out from the back of the auditorium, "I've got a couple of things to say!"

You can keep me from the kingdom. I was wrong. That's beside the point. If I didn't know it now, I will know it then. I know I'm wrong. I know I shouldn't have despitely used you or cursed you or hated you. If I'm your son or your daughter or your husband or your wife, I really shouldn't have.

Maybe it doesn't come out in language that is forceful or malicious, but whatever I did that offended you, I should not have done it. That's now beside the point. My eternal salvation is at stake and you hold the key.

As I understand it (and this has something to do with confession on earth as well as confession in heaven) unless we get that worked out, probably you and I are both in trouble. There seems to be the implication that simply because it does have to be worked out, that I could be in a little bit of trouble if you haven't quite forgiven me. I don't know what my chances are. By the same token, I think you're in some trouble. Because when you are now fourth up in the next line and the Lord says, "You're the fellow who wants justice, right? Is that the message?" You're not going to want that any more than I did four steps before. And so we're both in trouble.

Unless we indeed understand the message of the baptismal covenants in this kingdom, and bear one another's burdens; and the way you can bear mine...it's an ironic thing, the atonement is ironic...is to take the sin back that I gave you. You shoulder the fact that I despitely used you. Forgive me of it. Take it on your shoulders. What kind of sense does that make? It doesn't make any sense.

We say, "You want me to bear Jeff Holland's burdens? He let the air out of my tires and took my parking space, and always is where the handicapped people are supposed to be. Butts into line at Albertson's, and all of these things, and you want me to bear that burden? I was the guy in line he butted in ahead against."

And the Lord says, "Yeah, in some strange way, that's what I want you to do. Bear his burden. Take back the things that will keep him from the kingdom. And that butting into line business is going to keep him out. Take it back, and I'll work out the rest of it with him."

I see this as the one way we consciously, conspicuously, dramatically present ourselves as members of the body of Christ; that we actively participate in the atonement. That is the sacrifice for sin, to bear the burden of somebody else's problems because whosoever else's they are, they were not His.

Those were not His problems for which that flesh was torn and that blood ran.

In that same spirit He's saying, "I'm going to give you a chance to try that. Oh, it will be tough. What you'll have to do is forgive your son for coming home at 10:30 instead of a quarter after. But summon your courage and try it. If you can try it...and even if he was wrong and even if he shouldn't have done it...if you can help him work it out and take part of the burden back on your shoulders, you'll know something about who I am and what I've done."

Let me read this from a man not of our faith:

As Christ bears our burdens, so ought we to bear the burdens of our fellowman. The law of Christ, which it is our duty to fulfill, is the bearing of the cross. My brother's burden which I must bear is not only his outward lot, but his natural characteristics and gifts, and, quite literally, his sin. The only way to bear that sin is by forgiving it in the power of Christ which I now share. Thus, the call to follow Christ always means a call to share in the work of forgiving men their sins. Forgiveness is the Christlike suffering which it is the Christian's duty to bear.

That's okay until somebody does something you really didn't like. And that's okay, I guess, until you feel that it has personally offended you. Everybody can forgive sins in the abstract. I've handled Cain and Judas and a lot of other people very conveniently. But people who live next to me...theirs are obviously more serious transgressions and I've got to think a little longer about that. It's great to talk about shouldering one another's burdens, and in that way directly participating in the atonement, but I think that is not easy. The attempt is to bring us back whole before God. To clean the slate. To unify. To reconcile. You and I are reconciled. Heaven and earth are reconciled. God and man, men and men, women and women, we are reconciled then as we come back to Him with whom we must ultimately be united. We're looking for that at-one-ment between each other and from Him.

I remind you at this moment, you need to remember that sin is the great cleaver. It is sin in your life or mine that will keep us from that unity. It is sin in your life or mine that will make it harder to administer justice or charity or longsuffering or kindness or patience. Surely if everyone were as Christ was, if we could all live as the Prince of Peace, then it would be a marvelously easy and a wonderful thing to be kind and patient, because we'd have such cause to be so. The task is to be like He was in a world that is not like He was. It is to be kind when people are unkind to you. It is to be patient when people are impatient with you. It is to bless those who curse you, and to pray for those that despitely use you.

It seems to me, the unity Christ urgently sought, he started, particularly in those last hours. Why did He wash the disciples' feet? Well, He gives a little message about that in the 13th chapter of John. He says, in part, why He washed the disciples' feet is because the Master is not greater than the servant. And there's a message in that. Let me read what the Prophet Joseph said about washing feet:

It was never intended for any but official members (so we're talking about a committed, baptized, authorized Latter-day Saint). It is calculated to unite our hearts, that we may be one in feeling and sentiment and that our faith may be strong so that Satan cannot overthrow us, nor have any power over us here. Satan is the great cleaver. Sin is the great cleaver. Christ and hope and faith and future and celestial possibility is in unity. It is calculated to unite our hearts, that we may be one in feeling and sentiment, that our faith may be strong, that Satan cannot overthrow us, nor have any power here.

Why did He pass the sacrament? Why did He pass the cup? Why does he take this paschal meal and make out of it a new ordinance? Is it about unity?

I guess, if we weren't so squeamish about hygiene, I'd go back tomorrow to a common chalice and

pass it down the rows of that sacrament meeting. I'd have every person in that congregation drink from the very same cup. I'd say we're united and I'm drinking and passing and drinking and passing. By the time it goes around that circle, we will be united, of one heart and sentiment. And Satan will not overthrow us nor have any power here.

Why did they sing a hymn? It says they sang a hymn before they went out on the mount. What does a hymn do for you in church? May I suggest that it unites you, that you have someone leading you, that you agree on some words and on some notes and on some emotion and on the message, and you sing it together. My guess is we need to do better in this church about singing hymns. I have no particular musical gift. I have no musical gift at all. But I try to sing to the top of my lungs, because I believe it is an act of unification, and atonement, if you will, along with the sacrament and washing the feet and passing through temple corridors and greeting one another and things that tie us together and keep Satan away.

What should love do in a family? What should love do in a classroom, or in a church or in a nation or in a world? Is it possible, is it too much to dream, that we could be united, that we could be peaceful, that people could live together in love?

A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another.

Why did He promise the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth? I invite you to pursue the passages of the 19th chapter of 3 Nephi, about what the spirit can do if we believe in its reception, and what it can unite and cause to happen. Why does He then conclude with what President McKay called the greatest prayer ever uttered in this world, not excluding the Lord's Prayer? That is the 17th chapter of John. Why would someone go out in his own time of need and pray and say,

I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name...that they may be one, as we are. ...Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me...that they also may be one in us.... The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one. (John 17:11-23)

What is He getting at? This is all before the atonement, this is all before the cross. What are all these incessant, repeated reminders of unity and faith and harmony and closeness and stand-by-each-other and keep Satan away?

Of all others, he believed in that unity. So much so that He says,

My meat is to do the will of him that sent me. The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do. The Father loveth the Son. I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. The Father Himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. I am come in my Father's name. I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me. I am not come of myself, but He that sent me is true, whom ye know not, but I know Him. I am of Him. He sent me. The Father hath sent me and beareth witness of me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also. If I honor myself, my honor is nothing. It is my Father that honoreth me. I and my Father are one. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. Believe in the Father, and the Father in me. He that hateth me, hateth my Father also. I am not alone. [This is why He can do what he does. This is why He gets to the crest of the hill.] I am not alone.

"Some of the rest of you are having some problems. You're fractured and broken and bleeding. And I will be, in a way, in a moment. But I understand it, and I have something you don't. I am not alone. I am united. I am reconciled. I am one with the Father. I am one with all men. I am calm as a sum-

mer's morn (to pick up another prophet's phrase). I am not alone."

When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. Ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.

Eli, eli, lama sabachthani. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.

Eli, eli, lama sabachthani. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

What father and mother can stand by and listen to the cry of their children in distress and not render aid and assistance? I have heard of mothers throwing themselves into raging streams when they could not swim a stroke. I've heard of fathers rushing into burning buildings at the expense of their own lives...all this to rescue those whom they love. (Melvin J. Ballard, Sermons and Missionary Service [ed. Bryant Hinckley, 1949], pp.151-155)

We cannot stand by and listen to cries without it touching our hearts. God the Father had the power to save, and He loved His Son, and He could have saved Him. He might have rescued Him when the crown of thorns was placed on His head. He saw the Son condemned and faint under the load. He saw Him dragged across the streets. He saw His body stretched out, cruel nails driven through His hands and feet, and blows that broke the skin and tore the flesh and let out life's blood of His Beloved Son. He could have rescued Him when they mocked, "Save thyself, and come down from the cross." He looked upon this with great grief and agony over His Only Begotten Son, and then He heard what must have been the most unbearable words ever uttered, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

In that hour I think I can see our dear Father, behind the veil looking upon these dying struggles until even he could not endure it any longer, and, like the mother who bids farewell to her dying child, has to be taken out of the room, so as not to look upon the last struggles, so he bowed his head, and hid in some part of his universe, his great heart almost breaking for the love that he had for his Son. Oh, in that moment when He might have saved his Son, I thank him and praise him that he did not fail us, for he had not only the love of his Son in mind, but he also had love for us. I rejoice that he did not interfere, and that his love for us made it possible for him to endure to look upon the sufferings of his Son and give him finally to us, our Savior and our Redeemer. (ibid.)

I know now why God is a jealous God. I believe God is jealous lest we should ever ignore or slight or forget this His greatest of all gifts to us.

Oh, remember, remember!

I see a drama enacted at the airport regularly. I guess I've seen it a hundred times. I saw it recently and share it with you as a concluding testimony. It was obvious that a missionary was coming off a plane because the whole airport was crawling with conspicuous-looking missionary relatives. There was a father who did not look particularly comfortable in a suit. He seemed to be a man of the soil, a man of outdoors. He was tanned and large and had work-scarred hands, white shirt, that he probably did not choose to wear except on Sundays. A mother who was quite thin, looked like she had worked very hard in her life, and she had...I think it must have been linen, but it looked like tissue...this thing, shredded. She was just milking this thing. I don't know how long they'd been there, but it

was in poor shape by the time I got off the plane. There was a girl who...you know. She was on the verge of cardiac arrest. Two or three little kids running around who were noisy and they were trying to keep them. I breezed past, as I am about to do, headed for the gate. I thought, "This is one of the great human dramas of all time. Stick around." And I stopped. I just slipped in the back and waited and watched. The missionaries were getting off the same plane I'd been on, and I'd seen half a dozen of them. They still had their tags on and were working on the stewardesses. And so I just waited.

I found myself starting to gamble appropriately on who would break first. I really thought that the girl would want to, but, you know, that might not be too discreet and you shouldn't appear too assertive. My guess is that, from looking at that handkerchief, this mother needed to do something to release the pressure. I guess in my heart I really thought it would be the little kids. They were so rambunctious and rowdy anyway, that I thought one of them would burst out. But I sat there weighing this until I saw him start to come off the stairs and he looked like Captain Moroni: clean-cut and handsome, and he probably had known the work his father and mother had known, and that's probably why he was a good missionary. He had his hair trimmed again and looked like he had a reasonably new coat; better clothes, for all intents and purposes, than anything his parents had on. He started down off the steps and started out across the apron towards the building. And then, indeed, someone broke. And it wasn't the mother, and it wasn't the girlfriend, and it wasn't the children. This big, slightly awkward, bronzed, scarred, sort of giant of a man put an elbow into a United Airlines attendant and ran, just ran, out onto that apron and grabbed that boy. I guess he could have killed him. This missionary was 6'2" or so, but this big bear of a man just grabbed him and held him, and for the longest time, nothing happened. It seemed like half an eternity went by. They just held each other. The kid dropped his briefcase and put a new London fog coat on top of it and they just held each other.

I thought of God the Eternal Father, hiding in some great corner of His universe, while His boy goes through this for you and for me; when He doesn't have to do it, when He's paying His own way, so to speak, when He's saved His money all His life to do it, that at some moment He heard these words: "It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Now, I don't know what kind of seven league boots a father uses to rush through the space of eternity. I don't know how far away in the universe you have to go to not hear the cries of "Eli, eli, lama sabachthani?", but even in my limited imagination I can see that reunion. And I pray for it for you and for me. I pray for reconciliation and forgiveness, for mercy, for the growth I've got to go through if I make it, for the mercy that God has got to extend if I make it. I pray for that for you and for me.

Some little unknowing Roman centurion, at this moment when the veil was rent and the rocks were rent and the earth trembled, when God in His heaven said, "Let me tell you just a little how I feel about this. I too am charitable and merciful, so I won't exact the uttermost farthing, but I'll tell you, just for a moment or two, how I feel about all of this."

And the empty, ragged, unresponsive, empty remnant of Judaism was rent: the veil of the temple, from the top to the bottom, and He says, "That's what I feel about religion that doesn't work. That's what I feel about outward forms that don't have any mercy; and kindness and charity and longsuffering and lamb of God to them."

I assume that veil, figuratively or literally, will never again be without rent, until Christ Himself comes to the Mount of Olives. By the same token, it seems to me that He rent the very earth, a little commentary to the holy Roman Empire about how impressed He was with political power or geographical dominion, or anything else that men wanted to conceive. In the middle of all that, with

skies having been darkened, and rocks rent, and temples nearly destroyed, this little Roman centurion looks up and says it for all of us, for time and for all eternity, “Oh truly, truly this was the Son of God.”

I testify to you that He is the Son of God, and that I can’t talk about it without being emotional. My needs are too great. My sins are too many. My cry for justice and equality and fairness are too dominant in my life. I am not merciful. I am not kind. I am not longsuffering. I am not charitable, at least in any way that I know we’re going to have to be. I apologize for coming undone about this, but in my mind’s eye, I stand with that centurion, probably with all the problems he had, and about as far away from the kingdom as he was. But I testify with him in His holy name, that this was the Son of God, and that if we will be like Him, if we will remember to remember, from Adam’s little altar, to the commitments, to our own sacramental table and temple ordinances; if we’ll just remember, then indeed there is hope for us: for those of us who marvel that He would descend from His throne divine to rescue a soul so rebellious and proud as mine. Of that majesty and atonement, I testify. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

a personal search for the meaning of the atonement

W. CLEON SKOUSEN + DECEMBER 18, 1980

This speech was given on December 18, 1980 at the invitation of Mission President Orville Matheny to over 200 missionaries at an all-mission conference of the Dallas, Texas mission.

Brother Skousen recorded in his journal, "There was such a marvelous spirit at the conference that I felt impressed to speak on the Atonement instead of the Christmas Story. I spoke for an hour and twenty-five minutes and it was a beautiful experience for me. President Matheny had arranged to have the talk video-taped as well as recorded so I took the time to give scriptural references for everything I said so the missionaries could look up the passages for themselves."

I've always been puzzled, as a boy, by the Easter story. I used to sit there in Sunday School, in Raymond, Alberta, Canada, and I used to sit there and they'd tell me how Jesus suffered on the cross and I'd, that just left a lot of questions in my mind. Now here's a person, a beautiful, beautiful person. Son of our Heavenly Father and He's up on that cross, got a crown on his head made of thorns, He's got dried blood down his face, He's been all lacerated with a cat-of-nine-tails, and He's up there on that cross, He's got spikes in his hands, and He's got them in his wrists and He's got them in his feet, and He's just all sweaty and bloody, and he's hanging there on the cross. And I want to know what that's for. I want to know what that does. What does that help do? And who wanted that anyway?

Everybody said it's necessary. I want to know why. I want to know what it accomplishes. What's he doing up there? Romans crucified a lot of people, but, why the son of God? What was this for? Why did they prophecy? Why did Enoch say he would die on a cross? So I used to say that to myself every Easter. So when I got on my mission, age 17, I'm riding on a train with an apostle of the Lord. He's sitting there like all mission presidents do – worrying about the conference that we're going to have and the missionaries, I guess. He is very quiet and meditative and I said, "Brother Widtsoe, can I ask you a question?" He said, "Oh, oh, yes." For I knew I had awakened him from a reverie of meditation on something. He was a very famous scientist, by the way, brother Widtsoe. I said, "I wanted to just ask you about why the Atonement was necessary." I said, "I accept the fact that it is but I just wondered why? I wondered what would happen, or what caused it, to have the Father require the Son to go through this." And he said, "Elder Skousen, who asked you to ask me this question?" "Oh," I said, "well, I, nobody. It's my question. Nobody asked me to ask it." He said, "I'm not asked that question very often. Do you really want to know why the Atonement was necessary?" And I said, "Well, if it's alright." "Yes," he said, "it's alright. How badly do you want to know the answer?" And I said, "Well, I've – I've wanted to know it ever since I was a little boy." "Alright," he said, "You know, if people don't ask questions, they can't hear the answer. So, I'll share the answer with you over a period of time." "Oh," I said, "I so appreciate that." and I got out my pencil. I said, "If you'll give me the verses and everything, I'll write it right down here." "Well," he said, "I'll tell you what to look for and I'll tell you which standard work it's in." I said, "aren't you going to give me the chapter and verse?"

He said, "I wouldn't deprive you of the thrill of finding it."

So he'd tell me, "Now this is what to look for. This is the source of God's power and this is where you'll find it in the early part of the Doctrine and Covenants (D&C). And here's where Jesus asked if he couldn't get out of it and this is in several passages in the New Testament and it'll say these things. Now you look for that. And then you'll find some very basic scientific truths located in second Nephi and this is what it will tell you." Do you know it took me seven years before I had located all of those passages!

And each time I'd see President Widtsoe, both on my mission and after I returned home, I'd report in. And he'd say, "Well, you're doing pretty good. I'll give you the section of the Doctrine and Covenants – try 88 or 29 or whatever it was." And so, I'd look and there it was, there it was. I'd read right past it several times and missed it. And finally, finally I wrote it all up and put it together and sent it to him.

"Alright," he said, "now, we need to get some of these things back into the mainstream of thought because the Latter-Day Saints aren't doing what Jacob said to do." He said, "We ought to talk about the Atonement and why it's necessary a little more." So he said, "Put that in your next book." And so I did in "The First Two Thousand Years", in the appendix-"Why Is The Atonement Necessary."

Now you listen to the angels when they appeared to the shepherds. The fact that Jesus was born wasn't the important thing. Just being born wasn't important. He frightened the shepherds terribly. I mean they were just out – it was early in the spring – it was April. It wasn't in December the 25th. That's when the Romans were celebrating the birth date of Sol, their sun god. Christians didn't have a birth date so they said, "Well we'll, now that we're adopting Christianity, we'll take the birth date of (Sol), the sun god. That's how it's happened to be the 25th of December. There aren't any sheep out on the 25th of December. They're out in the spring when the grass is starting. It starts the second week in March so that's why the shepherds were out there. So they're watching their sheep – lots of wolves out there in those days. That's why they are watching them. And all of a sudden it happened. Here's this burst of light and a personage appears and he knew he had scared them. Joseph Smith said, "When I prayed and Moroni came, I was expecting something to happen but even so, when he came he comforted me. That was the first thing he said was not to be afraid, "It's alright, it's alright."

So that's what the angel said, "Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy. Which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ, the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you, ye shall find him wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger." And then the heavenly choirs couldn't be held back and they just split back the veil and they sang until music just filled the skies. And they said one sentence over and over again. At least the shepherds were able to hear it enough times so they could remember it. "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Now, I think maybe we were there. I'm sure the saints from Adam on down. Maybe those of us who hadn't been on the earth weren't allowed to be there. But a lot of people were there and they sang. It was exciting to be there in that great conference just before Jehovah, who'd appeared to Nephi the second just that day before and said he was going to come in the flesh tomorrow and tonight would be the sign. Remember that?

Now here he is and he is ready, He's telling us all good-bye and he's about to go down into the amnesia of the second estate. So he won't even know who he is. You don't even know who you are. I don't even know who I am. Isn't that exciting?

By the time he was twelve he'd been ministered to by angels and they had told him who he was. He

had seen enough visions and revelations so he could pick up Isaiah, he could take Jeremiah, Ezekiel and talk to the most learned scribes there in the Solomon's porches on the temple square. And say, "Now this is what Isaiah really saw." They were fascinated that a twelve year old boy – hadn't even been to the school of Gamael yet – he knew all the answers to all these mystical scriptures that they had studied so hard trying to understand. By the time he was thirty he was ready for his ministry and had some marvelous experiences. He's still learning about himself. In fact, when he'd get wonderful things like Lazarus rising from the dead, he would say, "Thank you Father, thank you." And, he would cry. "You did it for me. Thank you, Father." And He'd cry.

He was just kind of learning what it was like to be the Son of God and to have these wonderful powers. But, I'll tell you as he approached that great final Gethsemane, that shook him. He thought he was equal to it. He was doing pretty good right up to the time that he saw Judas go out. He was pretty sad and he was looking around the table and He said, "One of you will betray me." Peter said, "John, ask him which one." So, John, the beloved, said, "Which one?" "He to whom I give the sop." He took some bread, dipped it into the gravy and handed it to Judas and said, "Whatsoever thou doest, do thou quickly." It was beginning to get to him. He had washed their feet already.

And as soon as Judas went out, he stood up in that seventeenth chapter of John and gives that great high priest prayer in which he said, "And now O Father, neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on them through their words. That they all might be one as thou Father art in me and I in thee. That they also might be one is us." That's a great prayer.

Then he said to his disciples, "I must go pray. I must pray!" And so he went from the upper room and apparently across the temple square and down through the golden gate and across Brook Kidren where we've walked so many times – I visited it for the 23rd time here in October. Went on up into the groves of the olive trees and then something interesting happened. Eight disciples he had waiting sort of at the gateway, they immediately fell asleep. Went further up the hill and had the three remaining apostles (there were only 11 of them since Judas left) and had them wait. And apparently John was the only one that stayed awake, as far as we know. At least he's the only one that recorded the details of what we know about what happened. And it says that Jesus went and threw himself full length – he didn't kneel at a rock or at a tree. He just threw himself on the ground.

And now I'm going to ask you to take out a piece of paper, so that you won't have to search for seven years for some of these choice, choice passages. You can put it on the back of your program or wherever is convenient.

I want you to put down first of all Mark 14:36. Where Jesus said to his Father, "O Father, all things are possible unto Thee." In other words, "You are God. You can do anything. You have it within your power." And then the petition, "Take this cup from me. Don't make me do it. Work it out some other way. Please! Do it without my having to go through with this." He was trembling.

Alright, now the Father knew there wasn't any other way. All things are possible unto God, but he's a God of law. He's a God of cause and effect. He's a God of love. He's a God of justice. But what the Son had been called to do is the way. There isn't any other way. So he had to send an angel. I wish we had the conversation. We can only guess what the angel might have said. But he ministered to Jesus and he probably said, "You don't have to do this. Everybody has their free agency. But the Father knew you would do it and that's why you were ordained from the preexistence because He knew you would. But you don't have to. If you don't do it, everything in which your hand participated by way of creation will go back to outer chaos. The earth, the animals, the plants, the human beings, their bodies, all the other planets on which there are similar families that you helped create – they all go

back to chaos. The only way they can be preserved and perpetuated and exalted is to have you do this.”

The angel probably said something like that. At least, he convinced the Savior that he must go forward if he wanted the Father’s will to be done. And so that’s when Jesus said, “Thy will be done.” And he sweat great drops of blood. Now let me give you the other passages that fill in the details. Matthew 26:39. “Let this cup pass from me.” Luke 22:43. The angel came and ministered to him. Luke 22:44. As soon as he had said, “Thy will be done” the terror of the assignment came upon him with such an overwhelming impact that the capillaries of his circularity system couldn’t even contain his blood. And it came through the sweat glands onto his skin as it were great drops of blood. That’s a kind of suffering you and I probably couldn’t even contemplate, let alone endure. But, He did. And then he said in Matthew 26:42, “Thy will be done.”

One of the things that you learn in studying the scriptures is to get all of the authorities who talked about the same incident – take all of the details that each of them have – and then piece them together so that you’ve got the whole picture. And that’s the one we have here. Now, Jesus describes his terror in D&C 19:15-19. I’m going to read that to you in a moment, not now.

In Acts 4:12 we are told that the Father could not have saved us. There is only one name given under heaven whereby you can be saved and it is not Eloheim. Now I don’t know whether that disturbs you or not. I thought God could do anything. Why couldn’t He save us after we had fallen? Does that question bother you a little? That’s the one I asked Brother Widtsoe. Doesn’t God love us as much as the Son? It’s his plan to have us come down. Why is there only one name given under heaven whereby we can be saved and doesn’t include the Father, only the Son.

Is there an answer to that? “Yes,” Brother Widtsoe said, “there’s an answer.” Seven years – you know, he didn’t tell me about that part. But, anyway, now I think that’s enough – just draw a line. That raises all the questions. Now let’s look for some answers.

Brother Widtsoe didn’t give me the answers the way I have lined them up here. He gave me some of the big answers first and I want to start with one of the fundamental answers, which is the bottom line of where it all happens. Would you write down **2 Nephi 2:14**.

Father Lehi is on his death bed. He’s trying to share with his sons the last element of gospel testimony before he passes away. He’s pleading with his sons to acknowledge and recognize the great truths of the gospel. He said you must realize that there is a God and that he created everything either to act or to be acted upon. Now, there are two building blocks in the universe. One building block consists of an active ingredient. It acts. There is another thing that doesn’t act but it can be acted upon. Now, you’ve read that in second Nephi. I had read it. I’ve gone through the Book of Mormon as a teacher over a hundred times teaching it or studying it. Over a hundred times. It’s like President Mathiney said, “My brethren, people keep adding things to the Book of Mormon for me. I keep finding new things.” Well, that’s one that I finally found. I didn’t find it on my own. Brother Widtsoe said, “It’s there, now you look for it in the early part of second Nephi.” There it was, something to act and something to be acted upon. Put down **D&C 93:30**. “That which acts,” the Lord said, “is called intelligence or light.” Now, what’s an intelligence? No description, except that it’s like light. Everything that exists which is truth is filled with intelligence. Everything is filled with it. Now the best way for you to know about intelligence is to find out about it the way I found out about it.

I said Brother Widtsoe, “What’s an intelligence like?”

He said, “Well, look in the mirror and tell me. You’re an intelligence.”

“Oh! That’s right, oh, that’s good. Yes I’m an intelligence, aren’t I?”

Now he said, “How big are you?”

I said, “I don’t know.”

He said, “Where are you?”

“Well, I’m right here.”

He said, “You’re not down there. Did you notice. Isn’t that down from where you are?”

“Oh! Yah, it is.”

He said, “Take ahold of your chin. Shut your eyes.”

So, I did.

Now, he said, “Is that below you or above you or is that right on?”

I said, “That’s below me.”

He said, “Take ahold of your ear. Is that beside you?”

I said, “Yeh, that’s out there.”

He said, “Where is your little ‘I am’?”

I said, “It’s way in there, isn’t it?”

He said, “I think so. It’s way back in there. It’s a little tiny ‘I am’. It’s self knowing, it’s self determining, it’s anticipatory, it can learn, it’s a little intelligence. Fascinating! And it always existed as an independent entity. A little ‘I am’.” Oh, alright, that’s an intelligence, alright.

Now, D&C 93:29-30. Intelligence is eternal and it is independent to act for itself. That’s what the Lord said. This is the essence of reality that acts for itself. Alright, Abraham 3:19-23. The intelligences, see it talks about spirits and that some are more intelligent than others. Then it tells you that its talking about spirits which are organized intelligences. So, you’re really talking about intelligences that are one above another. This is the fact that intelligences are organized and graded. What the Lord is saying and we start out with the little ones and we come up and here you are some of my most magnificent intelligences that I gave bodies in my image. You’re real super – you’re special.

Joseph Smith described the graduated intelligences that are structured in nature. Documented History of the Church 4:519. And he says he gave this sermon to the apostles and their wives so that they’d know this wonderful, marvelous God science of graduated intelligence. But, then he didn’t say any more about it and then we have to go to the brethren, the early brethren who heard it to get more details.

That which is acted upon is called element. Now that’s D&C 93:33. Put down Journal of Discourses 7:2 where Brigham Young says these little bits of element are capacitated to receive intelligence. Now, notice what happens. You get a little piece of element and it must be extremely tiny. You attach a little intelligence to it and you can now talk to it and say, “Move that little fellow over here. You two combine together. Now bring in three more. That’s fine. Let’s get this thing going now. We’ve got ourselves a little atom here working around. We get enough of those and you’ll get a molecule. It’s a universe when you get through. I don’t know how many, maybe a million little intelligences and bits of elements all spinning around that little universe there. We call it an atom, it’s so tiny you can’t see it. We put a lot of them together and we get a molecule. And they’ll do certain things.

The Lord said in the 88th section how he gives them orders and he gives them a pattern that they follow. They'll always follow that pattern, unless you want them to do something else. And so you get two little molecules that we call hydrogen and another little molecule that acts completely different, called oxygen, and you put them together and you got water. You see, isn't that nice we got water. But, Jesus said, "Wine. You know what to do. High grade of wine, please." And it happened. All of a sudden the mystery is gone out of the miracle. You and I perform things by playing force against force. That's the way you make a motor go – you know you explode something and it's force. The Lord talks to things. That's a better way won't you agree?

See, God doesn't violate law. He sets things going. And so you've got H₂O – it's water. He said, "But, I need wine." "Oh, Alright." Now, that's the universe in which we live. This is God science, and Brother Widtsoe said, "Isn't that thrilling Elder Skousen?" and I said, "I never even thought of that being a possibility." He said, "God has revealed so many marvelous things to us if we'll just study it out and put it all together."

Alright, just a little bit more here. Abraham 4:9, 10, 12, and 18 where you see intelligence responding to commandments of the Gods during the creative process. Watch what it says, "And the Gods commanded the dry land to come up. And they watched until they were obeyed." Dirt doesn't obey as dirt unless it had intelligence in it. Would it? I mean, if it's just ... stuff. It has no capacity to obey. This is one of the great revelations of God. These little intelligences are in everything. I can move a mountain. I just tell it to move and I can let my priesthood tell it to move and if it's authorized, it'll move.

Nephi the Second was told by the Lord, "I have declared before all my angels that when you speak all things are to obey you as though God had spoken it. And I know that I can share this power with you because you'll never use it till I tell you to." And he could say to the clouds, "Don't rain. Go away." Or he could say, "Clouds come in and let us have rain." That's the power of God. Jesus would come and say to the little cells of the eyes, "You have not functioned properly since the birth of this man. In your places, please." The man says, "I can see." "Crooked arm, straighten." And it straightened. "Feet, walk." And everything goes into its proper order. And we call these miracles. It is the science of God speaking to his creations and saying, "Straighten up and fly right like you were suppose to." That's what he is doing. Now there's the key to the miracles. Now this is going to bring this closer to something else in just a moment.

When God commands, they obey. Let's take Helaman 12:3-18 where he describes all of the things that obey on God's command. They obey just like they did during the creation process. Take Jacob 4:6 – add that also. And 1 Nephi 20:13. Why, Jacob says, "We can have the water obey us, trees obey us when we speak with the priesthood." D&C 88:38-42 where the Lord says, "intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence" to do the things God has instructed it to do.

Now we come to a most interesting passage hidden away. It took me a long time – I read over it at least 10 or 15 times. Brother Widtsoe says, "You're missing it. It's in Section 29." I said, "I couldn't find it." He said, "Read it again." I still didn't find it. He said, "I know. Read it again. You have to get the spirit when you read. Maybe you'll get it this time." Finally got it! **D&C 29:36**. God says, "My honor is my power." Do you want to know where God got his power from? He said, "It's my honor that gives me power." Brother Widtsoe said, "This is a priesthood principle that often isn't quite appreciated, You are ordained from above. Your power comes from that over which you have supervision."

What makes a great bishop? His ordination? He's ordained from above, isn't he? What makes him a great bishop? It's home teachers home teaching. It's Sunday School teachers preparing their lessons. It's people having Home Evening, paying their tithes, going to the temple. And people say, "My, what

a great bishop.” Why? He is being honored in his calling. That’s what makes a great bishop. He was ordained from above. He was supported from those below that he supervised. Do you follow that? “My honor is my power.” “Water, wine.”

When God appeared to Moses – he was 80 years old when God appeared to him on Mount Sinai (which means “burning bush”). And the Lord said, “I’m now going to rescue Israel out of Egypt.” Moses said, “Oh! I think that’s just great because I’ve got Miriam, my sister is down there. Mother is still down there and Aaron is still down there. I’m so happy to hear about that.” And the Lord said, “And I’m going to have you bring them out.” Moses said, “Oh! No! ... No! I’m a capital fugitive, no, they’d kill me.” Well, the Lord said, “I’ll go with you.” Moses said, “I’m still scared.” The Lord said, “What do you have there in your hand?” “My shepherd staff.” “Throw it on the ground.” He threw it on the ground. A serpent! A metamorphosis took place.

The Lord said, “Pick it up.” So he did. By the tail, of course. And it became a staff. Now, watch what the Lord said, “You see that hand. Do you want to see the miracle of God? See that hand? That hand is made of dirt. Isn’t that fantastic? That hand is made of dirt. The Lord said to Moses, “Put your hand in your bosom.” So he did. And the Lord talked to that hand and said, “Now my children. Don’t go all the way back. Let’s go back ... leprosy – simulate leprosy. Moses, take your hand out.” Dripping with an incurable disease. “Moses, put your hand back in your bosom.” And the Lord said, “My children, as you were. Moses, take your hand out.” “Oh... !,” Moses said. Beautiful pink flesh. Isn’t that marvelous? And the Lord said, “And if you want to take water and pour it out and have it be blood, I’ll do for you. That they may know that you come to them not by your own strength only but by the very power of God.” So, Moses did it you remember. Finally he consented to go.

Now, once we understand some of these principles, we are beginning to comprehend a little bit about the God we worship. And that’s what the Lord says, “I want you to understand more about me. I want you to understand I’m not way off, a mystical being. I’m your loving Heavenly Father and I operate in an atmosphere of cause and effect and in a universe of law. There’s nothing magic about what I do. Everything is based on a science and I’m trying to teach it to you gradually.”

Alright now just a little bit more. We are told that God must maintain the confidence of these intelligences in order that they will sustain him and honor him. No other church has even dared to preach this doctrine. And no other scripture contains it save the Book of Mormon. That it is possible for God to fall. Now, he isn’t going to, because he knows how to avoid it. He just wants us to know that he walks a razor’s edge of necessity of having his conduct – as the great arbiter of heaven whom they all love and respect – absolutely immaculate in dispensing justice and truth and his love among them.

Now that’s a great discipline, is it not? Put it down now, this is Alma 42:13, 22, and 25 and Mormon 9:19. All of these passages say, “... or he would cease to be God.” Who dares preach such a principle? That God is under the necessity of maintaining certain conditions or he could cease to be God. He wouldn’t have power any more. How could he lose his power? By not being honored any more.

Now, you have the problem of the Atonement. Our Father wanted us to come into a laboratory where good and evil existed side by side. Where you and I could learn for ourselves. Not because Father said so, but we could learn for ourselves the difference between good and evil. And have you noticed, a little rubs off? In fact, you have to repent and erase it continually. It keeps rubbing onto us. You think you’ve just about got it whipped and the next thing you know, you’re doing it again. Or, you’re tempted to do it again. That’s life. And, that’s how we learn the difference between good and evil and the penalties thereof. You never went through this before. You learned how to be obedient in heaven because our Heavenly Father told you what the results would be if you didn’t. And sure enough it

would happen. But you couldn't quite understand. He gave you the criteria but you didn't know for your self the Book of Mormon says. That's why you came into this life. You're really learning for yourself. So am I. Believe me I'm learning.

Alright, so the next passage is **Alma 34:9** where "the Father cannot save us. The atonement is indispensable." You have to have an atonement. But, what would happen if there hadn't been an atonement? Would you like to know that one? Alright, it's 2 Nephi 9:7-9. That's what would happen if there hadn't been an atonement. We all would have become subject to Lucifer and suffering the same consequences which the early brethren made very clear was total dissolution. Which means that they are stripped of their spirit body. They are stripped of all things that pertain to the organized kingdom of God and are cast back into outer darkness, naked. A naked intelligence. Unorganized! And the early brethren thought well maybe then they'll get another chance – they'll be scooped up again, you know, and come into another creation. The Lord said in the Doctrine and Covenants, "Don't ever preach that they will be a second chance. I have never authorized that to be taught – that they get another chance." So, we don't preach that.

Now, how does the Atonement work? Alma 34:11. We can go quickly now. We have the problem. We have the basic ingredients for the solution. One person cannot pay for the sins of another. Now that's Amulek, that's not Alma talking. That's a new convert to the Church, a missionary companion of Alma talking to the Zoromites – the name's Amulek – that's him talking. I hear people quoting Alma on this, no this is Amulek talking. He said, "One person cannot satisfy the demands of justice by paying for the sins of another." You just stop and think whether or not this is true.

Let's say I have committed a heinous offense, a capital offense. And this good elder loves me enough to offer his life on behalf of my offense for which I should die. Does that satisfy any of you? Do you feel good about that? Are you satisfied? Do you feel justice has been done? Has it satisfied your sense of justice? Amulek said no, it won't. Now this is a very important thing to understand about the atonement. I hear people preaching for this much sin there had to be this much suffering and that's what Jesus provided. No, that's the law of quid pro quo.

Amulek says the Atonement is based on a completely different principle. It isn't quid pro quo. It isn't this much suffering for this much sinning. It's a different doctrine entirely. That's what Paul was so upset about when the Jews tried to preach that doctrine. We have it back in the Church being taught occasionally that way. Then what does Amulek say the key to the Atonement was? He said it was Jesus going on that cross. It had to be somebody, not you and me, but someone who is infinitely loved. Now that's universally – infinitely means universally loved. Who would be so terribly tortured in his role as our leader that the sense of compassion in every little intelligence would be touched.

Now isn't this interesting? You're this same way. You are subject to compassion. Every intelligence can be reached. He has a sense of compassion. It's necessary to somehow reach that sense of compassion sufficient to overcome the demands of justice. Because, when our Heavenly Father puts us down here and we try to repent the best we can, we're still unworthy to come back. Are we not? It's impossible to become perfect in this life. Right? Everybody agree to that? "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Does that sound familiar. Alright, you can't become perfect in this life. Those little intelligences say, "Father, remember, you held us back." You can't overlook them. Our Father wanted us to learn the difference between good and evil and it's impossible for Him, then, to bring us back. Everybody see the problem?

Now how does he get us back? He ask us to do the best we can. Then he says, "We've worked it out.

We've found out how we could reach those little intelligences. So, when Jesus was on that cross that suffering has to be so terrible that it is infinite in its persuasive power. That we mean that much to Him so that when He pleads for us, He doesn't do it because of our righteousness, because it wasn't that good. We did the best we could but it still wasn't perfect. He says, "They did the best they could now for my sake will you let them come up or I'll be robbed of the reward of my labor. Will you let them come up? And they say, "Jehovah, not for their sake, because they were imperfect, but if they mean that much to you, let them come up."

And so Amulek says, "That compassion that has been created in those little intelligences is enough to overcome the demands of justice." That's Alma 34. Let me give that one to you, Alma 34:15-16. So, the Atonement is not based on the law of so much suffering for so much sin. It's based on mercy and love. That's all it's based on. It's those little intelligences saying, "Alright, if they mean that much to you after all you've gone through." How much did he go through?

When Jesus was dedicated as the eldest son in the temple, an old man came hurrying up named Simeon. The Holy Ghost had whispered to him, "Rush to the temple today, you'll see the face of the Messiah as I promised you before, you would not die till you had seen him." He came up and took that little baby out of the arms of Mary and said, "Now, O Lord, God, Jehovah let me depart in peace for mine eyes have beheld thy salvation. The glory of thy people, Israel, and a light unto the gentiles." Then he handed the baby back and he said, "Because of him, little mother, one day sorrow will pierce your soul like a sword."

Thirty three years later on Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, she saw that beloved boy of hers nailed to that cross. Spiked, crown on his head, blood on his face, lacerated, sweating, crying out in suffering. What do you think that did to that mother? It was so intense that the Father had to do one final thing to make it supreme. He had to withdraw his spirit from Jesus. And that had sustained Jesus as it sustains all of us up to a point because it's in all of us. All of a sudden the Father withdrew his spirit from Jesus. As it left him, he cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani? My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?" Then the spirit came back and Jesus said, "Oh ... I did it! It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." And he died. At that moment, Jesus became the Christ.

You see, it's since I came to understand this and the suffering of the Father – that was a terrible experience for the Father. When He had to tell his son that it was necessary for him to go forward with it in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he had to withdraw his spirit from him on the cross, that was a terrible experience. And the Book of Mormon says the reason that Abraham was commanded to slay his own son Isaac was so that one earthly father would at least know what it's like to have the role of the Father and have to sacrifice your son. Abraham didn't have to go through with it but he was reconciled to it because he knew it was for a righteous purpose that he didn't understand. The Father just wanted Abraham, at least one father, to know a little bit what it's like to be the Father on the night of Golgotha. And then Jesus became the Christ.

Since this began to clarify itself in my mind and I began to see what was the meaning was of Jesus on that cross, he's become my personal Savior. I love Jesus. I love my Heavenly Father. I never realized before what they went through for me and my children and for you and all the rest of us. I've learned to love God with all my heart and feel closer to them. And I love to testify about them. I love to testify of their great mission to us and their great sacrifice. Both the Father and the Son—what they went through for our sakes.

Quite often I'm asked down here in Texas where I speak quite often, "Dr. Skousen, are you saved?" I usually reply by saying, "Thank you for asking that. May I bear you my witness?" They're used to

that. They want to hear my witness. And I say, “I have accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and I’ve asked my Heavenly Father to forgive my sins. I have made a commitment to my Heavenly Father that I will try to obey all his commandments by going down into the waters of baptism by immersion administered by one having authority. And then I have had hands laid upon my head by one holding the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood so that I could receive the great Gift of the Holy Ghost. Now I am endeavoring to endure to the end that I might have the great privilege of overcoming the very last hurdle, death, and being resurrected to glory and going back unto the Father. That’s my witness”...

Be valiant in your calling from morning until night. Be a good student. Mark your books. Study it out. Be prayerful. Try to understand God’s science of salvation. That’s all I’ve been talking about this morning – the real science of salvation. Why the atonement was necessary and it was. Why God, the Father, couldn’t do it. Why He said His Son is the only name given under heaven whereby we may be saved. So we will know that they have done their part. All we have to do is ours. So that is why Jesus makes such a plea to us.

Let’s read this in closing, D&C 19:15-19. “Therefore I command you to repent – repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, (You see he’s a God of love, but he also has to be a God of justice or the intelligences would loose confidence in him.) and by my wrath, and by my anger, and your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not. For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; (In other words, what we do is to repent in order to qualify.) But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; (Now notice how terrible it was.) Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit – and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink – Nevertheless, I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.” “I did it! I did it! I was so frightened. I was so scared. I trembled. I asked the Lord not to make me go through with it and he said I didn’t have to but you know the consequences no doubt.”

He was just so thrilled about it. Now, he said, “Don’t let that be wasted.” Turn to D&C 45:3-5. “Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—(See the Father loves us as much as the Son. It’s his plan, really! Because that’s what Jesus said in the preexistence, “Father, I will do it the way you want it done.” Lucifer wanted to do it a different way and take credit. The Son said, “I’ll do it as it’s been done before. I’ll do it. I will suffer.”) Saying: Father, behold the suffering and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified; Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life.” Now turn to Alma 34 ... beginning with verse 14, “And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, (Meaning the law of Moses.) every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal. (It’s going to reach every corner of the universe.) And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of his last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about the means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance. And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircle them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice;” ...this is the most profound principle of the whole gospel – the Atonement and why it was necessary...

Let me just give you an example now as I finish of Abraham Lincoln. I just want to show you how this happens every day in real life. If you want to see how intelligence overcomes the demands of

justice, watch this. There was a boy fighting in the Union Forces. 19 years old. Went to sleep on guard duty. And the opposition broke through and wiped out a whole flank of the army. Several hundred were killed, including some of the best friends of this young man. But he survived. Court-martialed. Sentenced to die. He expected to die. He thought it was only just that he die. And president Lincoln was ready to sign his death warrant for his execution and a little mother appears on the scene.

She says, "President Lincoln, when this war started, I had a husband and six sons. First I lost my husband, and one by one I lost five of my sons. Now I only have one son left and he's sentenced to be executed with a firing squad because he went to sleep. He feels awfully badly, he lost some of his best friends and he expects to die. President Lincoln, I'm not asking for the sparing of this boy's life for his sake, but for his mother's sake. He's all I have left. For my sake could you spare him?" President Lincoln said, "For your sake, little mother, I will spare him." And as far as I know President Lincoln was never criticized for that decision.

Does that touch the heart of compassion? Notice how that overcame the demands of justice. "For her sake, I will spare him." And so that's what's happened for us. And the salvation of Jesus Christ is very real and the price he paid was very terrible. And you're here to testify that Jesus is the Christ and that the Gospel has been restored to prepare for His second coming. Now that's our mission. Now I went to the mission field thinking that testifying of the restoration was my whole mission. No! That's incidental. The divinity of Jesus Christ is our main message. And the fact that He is now spoken to prophets and raised them up, they're now walking the earth the priesthood is back – that's our good news. We're preparing for the second Christmas. Where there'll be a thousand years of peace on earth, good will toward men.

I only pray that God will bless every one of us to fulfill our callings with valiance. That the Spirit can testify to thousands of His children that Jesus is the Christ. And if they can feel our testimony and they can enjoy the fruits of the Gospel... that's my prayer... in the name of Jesus Christ Amen.

(Read D&C 128:23)

the olive press

TRUMAN G. MADSEN + MAY 9, 1982

Truman Madsen was a professor of religion and philosophy at Brigham Young University and became director of the Jerusalem Center after it was inaugurated several years later.

My wife and I have returned only within hours from Jerusalem—the old Jerusalem which is now rapidly becoming new. Heavy on our hearts, therefore, is what we experienced there, and I would like to share with you tonight in an ambling fashion, if you will permit, some of those impressions.

A prophecy uttered by the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1842 is in fact being fulfilled before our very eyes: to wit, “Jerusalem must be rebuilt, and the temple, and water come out from under the temple, and the waters of the Dead Sea be healed, . . . and all this must be done before the Son of Man will make His appearance” (*Teachings*, p. 286).

On first touching that ground with our feet more than a decade ago, I think I had a prejudice that the setting of the Savior’s life really was not significant, that the meaning of his life and his words was what mattered, and that the events in the environment and circumstances of the time were not crucial. After many visits since, for we have both visited and lived there, I am of the contrary opinion: that he cared very much about the setting and that meaning is lodged, still, in the very rocks, in the very mountains, in the very trees of Israel.

On an earlier trip a woman past 82 traveled with us. She had to prepare at length, exercise, and get constant reassurances from her physician that she could endure the rigors. We were touched that, as we turned our backs on a church that has been built near—and some say over—the ancient site of Gethsemane, she who had come so far and had lived so long was on her knees near the place where tradition says Jesus knelt.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SETTING

North of Jerusalem is the Galilee. And I am struck that the location of Caesarea Philippi is at the mount called Hermon. It may be the Mount of Transfiguration. It is, in any case, at the headwaters of the Jordan, which then feeds the Galilee and in turn flows south and is literally the nourishment of all Israel. It was there, and I think he chose the place carefully, that the Savior announced to Peter, after Peter’s confession, that he would build his church as on a rock. I think it is significant that there is there still a huge, faced rock. Below it and in it is a cave, and out of that cave, at the time Jesus stood there, flowed water. Not so since—an earthquake changed all that. But was he, therefore, saying to Peter, who he knew by revelation was to be his presiding apostle, and of Peter, who by revelation had recognized him, “Upon this flowing rock I will build my church”? Well, such are the suggestions of the setting. Is it also, one may ask, only happenstance that he chose to be baptized near the waters called dead at the lowest point of the earth—it’s 1200 feet below sea level—descending thus even physically below all things?

SYMBOLISM OF TREES

There are trees in Israel, and we are taught from the record that each in a way was significant in his

ministry: palm trees, fig trees, oak trees, but most of all, olive trees. To this day the process of planting, cultivating, pruning, and harvesting from olive trees is a laborious one. The olives are at first bitter and useless. Hard labor and pressure are required to produce ripe, mellow olive oil. That, too, is done today. The recognition that, in the time of the Master, olives and olive oil and the olive mash that resulted from the crushing were the very essence of life comes to mind as one stands there.

THE TREE OF LIFE

Indulge me for a few moments further on the background of the every idea of trees. Religious literature is singularly impressed with the notion that somehow there is a tree of life representative of eternal life and love that is somehow planted in a goodly land, some traditions say on the very navel of the earth, the highest point of the earth which symbolically at least is the temple mount in Jerusalem, a tree planted and watered by the waters of life whose fruit is the most precious.

Our own Book of Mormon says further of that fruit that is sweet, that is pure, even that it is white. Even now, incidentally, in Hebron, in Israel, there are ripe, magnificent vineyards where the grapes are white, almost transparent. These happen to be the sweetest and the purest of the grapes. The imagery that it was so precious impressed Nephi after he was given the blessing of recapitulating the vision of his own father, Lehi. He said, "I behold. . . the tree . . . precious above all." But even that superlative didn't satisfy the angel, narrator of the vision, who said, "Yea, and the most joyous to the soul" (1 Nephi 11:9, 23).

The tree of life has been utilized through sacred history as the symbol both of Israel and of the Redeemer of Israel. There are traditions that in due time that tree, from which the branches had been ripped off and dispersed, would somehow be planted anew, and there would be graftings and gatherings anew until the tree was again productive.

THE OLIVE TREE

There is more to know about olive culture. It is interesting that the tree is not really a deciduous one. Its leaves never fall off; they are rejuvenated and stay. It is in that sense evergreen, or ever olive. It can be a wild thing without cultivation, but after long and patient culturing, usually eight to ten years, it becomes productive. More than that it continues to be, with age. There are trees today—for new shoots come forth from apparently dead roots—that are known by actual horticultural study to be 1800 years old. There may be trees on the Mount of Olives older than that. One could even say of the olive tree, "It is immortal."

As for the product of the processes: not just olives to be eaten, not just olive oil used by many today in the Middle East simply as a condiment for salads or as a cooking device. Olive oil was the substance of light and heat in Israel. Olive lamps, into which one poured the pure oil and then lighted it at one end, provided, even in a darkened room, light, enough light. Moreover, the mash, as I have spoken of it, provided fuel and burned long. Not only all this, but the balming influence, the soothing, salving influence of oil, was well known in their midst. The traditions about the olive branch and of the pouring of oil, was well known in Jesus' own day. We speak today of the olive leaf as a symbol of peace and of forgiveness (see D&C 88). Paul referred to it as the oil of gladness, and it is in that sense also symbolic of joy.

Did Jesus know all this? Surely he did. Was there something then significant in his choice of the mount known as the Mount of Olives? And was it true then, as now, that Mount Olivet was symbolic and sacred, all of it?

FOUR HOLINESSES

On that mount four holinesses came together. First, the place. It was eastward from the temple, the temple which by now had been desecrated, the temple which he first called on a day of cleansing, “my Father’s house,” but which later he spoke of as “my house.” In that house was a Holy of Holies with two olivewood pillars that stood there as entrances. They were, in turn, connected to the menorah, the perpetual lamp, and from them came two kinds of corridors, or tubes, into which were poured olive oil; then the tree burned.

A Jewish tradition says that, when Adam was about to die, he sent Eve and his son Seth back to the garden for healing oil. At the threshold they were met by an angel who said, “there will be no oil again until the meridian of time when the Messiah comes, and then the oil will be from the olive tree.”

Moses was commanded to teach the children of Israel “that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always” (Exodus 27:20). Such oil was burning in the time of Jesus, but it had lost its sacred significance, or had not yet received its full consecration.

THE PLACE AND TIME

He went on the mount overlooking the temple mount, as, says the scripture, “he was wont.” Luke says in the last days of his life he lodged there, he “abode there,” day and night. On that hill was a garden-orchard. More properly the word is vineyard. A vineyard of olive trees? Yes, precisely that same word is used in the parable or allegory in the book of Jacob, of the tame and wild olive tree. The lord of the vineyard, Dr. Sidney B. Sperry believed, was the Father of us all. The servant in the vineyard was the Messiah. The task, the weightiest in all history.

It is called Gethsemane. Geth or gat means press, and shemen in Hebrew means oil. The place of the olive press. You can see presses still in Israel, for, after the processes of salt and vinegar and pressure, the olives are gathered, placed in a bag, and then with a huge crushing rock—to push it usually requires an animal—crushed until the oil flows. “The place of the olive press.”

The time was holy. It was the hour, the week, of Pessach, Passover. We’ve been privileged to attend that sacrosanct celebration, Passover. Since the destruction of the temple it has been modified, but at the time of Jesus that was the day when they brought the lamb, the faultless lamb, down that very mount—to the altar, or if Passover was celebrated in some homes, to the home, and it was roasted and the blood sprinkled on the altar or, in the homes, on the doorposts. That was the season, the time.

THE PERSON AND THE NAME

Another holiness was the person. It was *ha Yeshua Massiach*, Jesus the Messiah, a stem, so Isaiah prophesied, of Jesse from the stump or the root of the house of David—he who had been the Revealer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he who had not only approached, but sat upon Jacob’s well, so the tradition says, and to a despised woman for the first time announced, “I am he.” I am he from whom shall flow living waters. It was he who had been prophesied. The word *messiah*, as it appears today in the King James Version of Daniel, has roots meaning the “anointed one,” with connotations of coronation and ordination. Now came the night when he would become the anointing one.

The word *messias*, as it is used by John in the Gospel of John, has another root, *tsahar*, meaning to glow with light as one glistens when one is anointed. To earn the name, the holiness of the name, he had to tread the press. The image of the press permeates Isaiah, as it does modern revelation (see Isai-

ah 63:3; D&C 76:107, 88:106). One day he will say, “I have trodden the press” (in this case the wine press, but the two merge) “I have trodden the wine press alone; I have trodden the wine press of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God.”

GETHSEMANE

Now that we have spoken of the holy place, the holy time, the holy person, and the holy name, a glimpse of what must have gone through him and of what he must have gone through. “Mine hour,” he had said often, “has not yet come,” but now it had. After the Last Supper one episode ended, “And it was night.” That’s an explanation—I think we need no other—for why the three, even though he pled, couldn’t stay awake. Somewhere, somewhere on that mountain, he knelt.

We have witnessed the effort of pious Jews as they stand—they do not kneel—at the place that is but a remnant of the wall below the ancient walls of the temple mount. Rhythmically, they throw their whole bodies into their prayer. They respond to ridicule: “We are fighting distraction. We want to concentrate. Movement helps.” The motions of that night, I suggest to you, were both internal and external. Somehow the bitterness, as bitter as gall, of iniquity entered him. It was the comprehension of the spiritual death, not just of the family of our Father who dwell upon this earth, but, we have been taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith, of other earths also. (So the atonement of Jesus Christ is, as Brother Maxwell has testified, intergalactic.) That burden, that bitterness, he vicariously took within him.

“How?” we cry out, but a child can understand. Pain, even the presence of it to those of us who merely stand detached and observe, hurts. He who did not and will not take a backward step from the will of the Father, supersensitive, could and did feel for and with us. The pressure worked upon him. Somewhere on the road between the north and south, he cried out anticipating, “Father, save me from this hour.” We don’t know how long the interim between that sentence and prayer and the next, but then he cried out, “But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.” And the voice said, “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again” (John 12:27–28).

Luke, perhaps a physician, is the one who says that great drops of blood came from his pores. The bitterness oozed. It is not a spectacle one wishes to recall, but we have been commanded, and weekly we memorialize it in an ordinance called the sacrament. All his preparation and all that he could summon from his own strength was not sufficient. “More earnestly,” says the record, he cried out. An angel came, strengthening him—strengthening but not delivering. What is it like to have the power, to have been promised the power, to summon legions of angels, to end the ordeal—and not to summon them?

He was, during that same night, betrayed. He was, after it, taken prisoner. He was broken into, pierced, by scourging. And the merciful reading of Pilate’s motives in permitting that is that he hoped it would suffice for those who were crying out against him. It did not. The weight, I submit to you, had begun there on the mount, much greater a weight than the weight of the cross that he was then to bear.

Sitting on the stand tonight is your Regional Representative, Dr. Russell M. Nelson, who once permitted me to put my ear down to a man who had just undergone surgery and who was now suffering radical internal bleeding. He wanted me to hear what he whispered. What he whispered was, “I am thirsty.” “I thirst,” Jesus said, and in response—was it an act of appeasement or one of mockery?—a sponge of vinegar was put to his lips. According to the Joseph Smith Translation, his last words were not just, ‘it is finished,’ but “My father’s will is done” (see JST Matthew 27:54).

CONCLUSIONS

Now, brothers and sisters, what conclusions from all this? Let me say first that I pray that hereafter, when you speak or hear the words, “I anoint you with this consecrated oil,” you will remember what the consecration cost.

I pray that, as you sit (but in our spirits as we kneel) at the sacrament table, and you are asked to remember his body and blood, you will recall that he is the veritable tree and olive beaten for the light, and that there flows from him unto this whole earth, and beyond, the redemptive power of healing and soothing and ministering to the needy.

I pray that in hours of gladness, should your cup run o’er, you will remember that, to make that possible, a cup, the bitterest of cups, was drunk.

I pray that when your life, the life of attempted faithfulness, is bludgeoned and becomes wearing and wearying, you will remember that no great and good fruit comes easily, that you are the olive plants who were supposedly planted anew in him, and that only time and suffering and endurance can produce the peaceable and perfect fruit which he yearns for you to have.

And finally I pray that, as we seek to be what he said he was, the light of the world, we will endure the days of affliction and be prepared for the day of joyous reunion. All the prophets have promised that both are ahead. One day he will honor the Mount of Olives again. This time he will descend in triumph. When his foot touches it, the mount itself shall separate, be shaken, and an earthquake will follow. The earth will be purged and cleansed and will eventually shine with celestial light. We are promised we may share in those culminations to descend with him or to ascend to meet him. And either of those is glorious.

Over and over, he spoke of himself as the Bridegroom preparing his own for a feast, the feast we have been promised in our own Doctrine and Covenants, when all worthies who have been made worthy will gather. In the beginning of this dispensation, the Master counseled, “Wherefore, be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed” (that means full) “and burning” (that means alight and afire) “and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom” (D&C 33:17)—and still later “that you may abide the day” (D&C 61:39).

Brothers and sisters, my testimony: I bear witness that Jesus is the Messiah and that he could not have known, according to the flesh, how to succor his people according to their infirmities unless in Gethsemane he had gone through what he went through (Alma 7). I bear testimony that his compassion for us, what one of the prophets calls “the bowels of mercy,” reaches out to the Father, who grieves that any tree in his vineyard should be lost. And that the Master pleads even now for more time for you and for me, until we, too, have been purged and can sing the song of redeeming love. I bear my testimony that he lives, that he came to bring life, and life more abundantly, and that he is our Redeemer. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

the sacrament and the sacrifice

DAVID B. HAIGHT + OCTOBER 1989

* * *

Six months ago at the April general conference, I was excused from speaking as I was convalescing from a serious operation. My life has been spared, and I now have the pleasant opportunity of acknowledging the blessings, comfort, and ready aid of my Brethren in the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, and other wonderful associates and friends to whom I owe so much and who surrounded my dear wife, Ruby, and my family with their time, attention, and prayers. For the inspired doctors and thoughtful nurses I express my deepest gratitude, and for the thoughtful letters and messages of faith and hope received from many places in the world, many expressing, “You have been in our prayers” or “We have been asking our Heavenly Father to spare your life.” Your prayers and mine, thankfully, have been answered.

One unusual card caused me to ponder upon the majesty of it all. It is an original painting by Arta Romney Ballif of the heavens at night with its myriad golden stars. Her caption, taken from Psalms, reads:

*Praise ye the Lord: ...
He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.
He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.
... His understanding is infinite. (Ps. 147:1, 3–5.)*

As I lay in the hospital bed, I meditated on all that had happened to me and studied the contemplative painting by President Marion G. Romney’s sister and the lines from Psalms: “He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.” I was then—and continue to be—awed by the goodness and majesty of the Creator, who knows not only the names of the stars but knows your name and my name—each of us as His sons and daughters.

The psalmist, David, wrote:

*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? ...
For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. (Ps. 8:3–5.)*

To be remembered is a wonderful thing.

The evening of my health crisis, I knew something very serious had happened to me. Events happened so swiftly—the pain striking with such intensity, my dear Ruby phoning the doctor and our family, and I on my knees leaning over the bathtub for support and some comfort and hoped relief from the pain. I was pleading to my Heavenly Father to spare my life a while longer to give me a little more time to do His work, if it was His will.

While still praying, I began to lose consciousness. The siren of the paramedic truck was the last that I remembered before unconsciousness overtook me, which would last for the next several days.

The terrible pain and commotion of people ceased. I was now in a calm, peaceful setting; all was

serene and quiet. I was conscious of two persons in the distance on a hillside, one standing on a higher level than the other. Detailed features were not discernible. The person on the higher level was pointing to something I could not see.

I heard no voices but was conscious of being in a holy presence and atmosphere. During the hours and days that followed, there was impressed again and again upon my mind the eternal mission and exalted position of the Son of Man. I witness to you that He is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God, Savior to all, Redeemer of all mankind, Bestower of infinite love, mercy, and forgiveness, the Light and Life of the world. I knew this truth before—I had never doubted nor wondered. But now I knew, because of the impressions of the Spirit upon my heart and soul, these divine truths in a most unusual way.

I was shown a panoramic view of His earthly ministry: His baptism, His teaching, His healing the sick and lame, the mock trial, His crucifixion, His resurrection and ascension. There followed scenes of His earthly ministry to my mind in impressive detail, confirming scriptural eyewitness accounts. I was being taught, and the eyes of my understanding were opened by the Holy Spirit of God so as to behold many things.

The first scene was of the Savior and His Apostles in the upper chamber on the eve of His betrayal. Following the Passover supper, He instructed and prepared the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for His dearest friends as a remembrance of His coming sacrifice. It was so impressively portrayed to me—the overwhelming love of the Savior for each. I witnessed His thoughtful concern for significant details—the washing of the dusty feet of each Apostle, His breaking and blessing of the loaf of dark bread and blessing of the wine, then His dreadful disclosure that one would betray Him.

He explained Judas's departure and told the others of the events soon to take place.

Then followed the Savior's solemn discourse when He said to the Eleven: "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33.)

Our Savior prayed to His Father and acknowledged the Father as the source of His authority and power—even to the extending of eternal life to all who are worthy.

He prayed, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

Jesus then reverently added:

I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. (John 17:3–5.)

He pled not only for the disciples called out from the world who had been true to their testimony of Him, "but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." (John 17:20.)

When they had sung a hymn, Jesus and the Eleven went out to the Mount of Olives. There, in the garden, in some manner beyond our comprehension, the Savior took upon Himself the burden of the sins of mankind from Adam to the end of the world. His agony in the garden, Luke tells us, was so intense "his sweat was as ... great drops of blood falling ... to the ground." (Luke 22:44.) He suffered an agony and a burden the like of which no human person would be able to bear. In that hour of anguish our Savior overcame all the power of Satan.

The glorified Lord revealed to Joseph Smith this admonition to all mankind:

Therefore I command you to repent ... for ... I, God, ... suffered ... for all, that they might not suf-

fer if they would repent; ... ·which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, ·Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power; and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments. (D&C 19:15–16, 18, 20.)

During those days of unconsciousness I was given, by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost, a more perfect knowledge of His mission. I was also given a more complete understanding of what it means to exercise, in His name, the authority to unlock the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven for the salvation of all who are faithful. My soul was taught over and over again the events of the betrayal, the mock trial, the scourging of the flesh of even one of the Godhead. I witnessed His struggling up the hill in His weakened condition carrying the cross and His being stretched upon it as it lay on the ground, that the crude spikes could be driven with a mallet into His hands and wrists and feet to secure His body as it hung on the cross for public display.

Crucifixion—the horrible and painful death which He suffered—was chosen from the beginning. By that excruciating death, He descended below all things, as is recorded, that through His resurrection He would ascend above all things. (See D&C 88:6.)

Jesus Christ died in the literal sense in which we will all die. His body lay in the tomb. The immortal spirit of Jesus, chosen as the Savior of mankind, went to those myriads of spirits who had departed mortal life with varying degrees of righteousness to God’s laws. He taught them the “glorious tidings of redemption from the bondage of death, and of possible salvation, ... [which was] part of [our] Savior’s foreappointed and unique service to the human family.” (James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1977, p. 671.)

I cannot begin to convey to you the deep impact that these scenes have confirmed upon my soul. I sense their eternal meaning and realize that “nothing in the entire plan of salvation compares in any way in importance with that most transcendent of all events, the atoning sacrifice of our Lord. It is the most important single thing that has ever occurred in the entire history of created things; it is the rock foundation upon which the gospel and all other things rest,” as has been declared. (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966, p. 60.)

Father Lehi taught his son Jacob and us today:

Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. ·Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. ·Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise. ·Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God, inasmuch as he shall make intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved. (2 Ne. 2:6–9.)

* * *

Immortality comes to us all as a free gift by the grace of God alone, without works of righteousness. Eternal life, however, is the reward for obedience to the laws and ordinances of His gospel.

sin, crimes, and atonement

DALLIN H. OAKS + FEBRUARY 7, 1992

Address to CES Religious Educators, February 7, 1992, Temple Square Assembly Hall

My dear brothers and sisters, I am grateful for this opportunity to speak to men and women who have been appointed to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the young people in our high schools, colleges, and universities. Yours is a sacred responsibility. You are custodians of truth and recipients of the trust of your students. They look to you as persons entrusted with a sacred curriculum. Your task is holy and your performance is therefore the subject of high expectations. Your teachings are, potentially, the most important your students will receive. All of us who have been called or appointed as teachers of religion have the sobering and sacred responsibility of trying to make ourselves and our performance worthy of the great message we bear. May God bless us as we strive to do so!

After Enos cried to the Lord in mighty prayer all day and into the night, a voice came to him saying: “Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed” (Enos 1:5). Knowing that God could not lie, Enos understood that his guilt was swept away. Then, he asked the question that provides the text for my remarks: “Lord, how is it done?” (v. 7).

It was done because of the Atonement and his faith in the Redeemer who paid the price (see v. 8). By an atonement that is both miraculous and beyond our comprehension, the vicarious sacrifice of the Lamb without blemish satisfies the justice of God. In this manner, we receive the mercy of God.

But what is justice? And what is mercy? And how do they relate to one another? These concepts are central to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are sometimes misunderstood because they are easily confused with comparable concepts we understand from our mortal preoccupation with what we call the criminal law. Indeed, our ideas about justice and mercy and the laws of God are sometimes shaped and confused by what we know about criminal justice as specified by the laws of man.

The young people you teach are susceptible to these misunderstandings. I have therefore chosen to speak about justice and mercy and the Atonement, and about repentance, confession, and suffering. I will compare and contrast how these realities relate to the content and enforcement of the laws of God and the laws of man. I hope you will help your students understand these important subjects and apply them in their own lives.

JUSTICE AND MERCY AND THE ATONEMENT

Justice has many meanings. One is balance. A popular symbol of justice is scales in balance. Thus, when the laws of man have been violated, justice usually requires that a punishment be imposed, a penalty that will restore the balance.

People generally feel that justice has been done when an offender receives what he deserves—when the punishment fits the crime. Our church’s declaration of belief states that “the commission of crime should be punished [under the laws of man] according to the nature of the offense” (D&C 134:8). The paramount concern of human law is justice.

Unlike the changeable laws of man, the laws of God are fixed and permanent, “irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world” (D&C 130:20).

These laws of God are likewise concerned with justice. The idea of justice as what one deserves is the fundamental premise of all scriptures that speak of men's being judged according to their works. Alma declared that it was "requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works" (Alma 41:3). The Savior told the Nephites that all men would stand before him to be "judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil" (3 Nephi 27:14). In his letter to the Romans, Paul described "the righteous judgment of God" in terms of "render[ing] to every man according to his deeds" (Romans 2:5–6).

According to eternal law, the consequences that follow from the justice of God are severe and permanent. When a commandment is broken, a commensurate penalty is imposed. This happens automatically. Punishments prescribed by the laws of man only follow the judge's action, but under the laws of God the consequences and penalties of sin are inherent in the act. "There is a law given, and a punishment affixed," the prophet Alma taught, and "justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment" (Alma 42:22). "And thus we see," Alma explained, "that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence" (v. 14). Abinadi taught that the Lord himself "cannot deny justice when it has its claim" (Mosiah 15:27). By itself, justice is uncompromising.

The justice of God holds each of us responsible for our own transgressions and automatically imposes the penalty. This reality should permeate our understanding, and it should influence all our teachings about the commandments of God and the effect of individual transgressions.

In keeping with the legal traditions of man, many seem to want justice. It is true that justice is a friend that will protect us from persecution by the enemies of righteousness. But justice will also see that we receive what we deserve, and that is an outcome I fear. I cannot achieve my eternal goals on the basis of what I deserve. Though I try with all my might, I am still what King Benjamin called an "unprofitable servant" (see Mosiah 2:21). To achieve my eternal goals, I need more than I deserve. I need more than justice.

This realization reminds me of an event that occurred in the law firm where I began practicing law almost thirty-five years ago. A Chicago politician had been indicted for stuffing ballot boxes. A partner in our firm told me how this politician came to his office to ask us to represent him in his criminal trial.

"What can you do for me?" he asked. Our partner replied that if this client retained our firm to conduct his defense, we would investigate the facts, research the law, and present the defense at the trial. "In this way," the lawyer concluded, "we will get you a fair trial."

The politician promptly stood up, put on his hat, and stalked out of the office. Pursuing him down the hall, the lawyer asked what he had said to offend him. "Nothing." "Then why are you leaving?" he asked. "The odds aren't good enough," the politician replied.

That man would not retain our firm to represent him in court because we would only promise him a fair trial, and he knew he needed more than that. He knew he was guilty, and he could only be saved from prison by something more favorable to him than justice.

Can justice save us? Can man in and of himself overcome the spiritual death all mankind suffers from the Fall, which we bring upon ourselves anew by our own sinful acts? No! Can we "work out our own salvation?" Never, worlds without end! "By the law no flesh is justified," Lehi explained (2 Nephi 2:5). "Salvation doth not come by the law alone," Abinadi warned (Mosiah 13:28). Shakespeare had one of his characters declare this truth: "In the course of justice, none of us should see salvation: we

do pray for mercy” (The Merchant of Venice, act 4, sc. 1, lines 199–200).

We know from numerous scriptures that “no unclean thing” can enter the kingdom of God (Moses 6:57; 1 Nephi 10:21; Alma 40:26). If we are to return to the presence of our Heavenly Father, we need the intervention of some powerful influence that transcends justice. That powerful intervention is the atonement of Jesus Christ.

The good news of the gospel is that because of the atonement of Jesus Christ there is something called mercy. Mercy signifies an advantage greater than is deserved. This could come by the withholding of a deserved punishment or by the granting of an undeserved benefit.

If justice is balance, then mercy is counterbalance. If justice is exactly what one deserves, then mercy is more benefit than one deserves. In its relationship to justice and mercy, the Atonement is the means by which justice is served and mercy is extended. In combination, justice and mercy and the Atonement constitute the glorious eternal wholeness of the justice and mercy of God.

Mercy has several different manifestations in connection with our redemption. The universal resurrection from physical death is an unconditional act of mercy made possible by the Atonement. Alma taught Corianton that “mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead” (Alma 42:23).

A second effect of the Atonement concerns our redemption from spiritual death. We are redeemed from the fall of Adam without condition. We are redeemed from the effects of our personal sins on condition of our obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.

Justice is served and mercy is extended by the suffering and shed blood of Jesus Christ. The Messiah “offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law” (2 Nephi 2:7; see also Romans 5:18–19). In this way “God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15).

We are all dependent upon the mercy God the Father extended to all mankind through the atoning sacrifice of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is the central reality of the gospel. This is why we “talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ . . . that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Nephi 25:26). The reality of our total dependence upon Jesus Christ for the attainment of our goals of immortality and eternal life should dominate every teaching and every testimony and every action of every soul touched by the light of the restored gospel. If we teach every other subject and principle with perfection and fall short on this one, we have failed in our most important mission.

LAWS OF MAN AND LAWS OF GOD

Now I come to my comparison of the laws of God and the laws of man. Here I will use the white board for our television audience, and invite those of you here in the Assembly Hall who cannot see the board to refer to the handout we have distributed (also printed at the end of this talk).

The laws of God achieve their purposes through justice, mercy, and the atonement of Jesus Christ. In contrast, the laws of man focus on justice; they have no theory of mercy, and they take no account of the Atonement. This contrast fosters the confusion I mentioned at the outset.

I will now proceed to consider the contrasting positions of the laws of man and the laws of God on some related subjects, such as repentance, confession, and suffering.

THE REQUIREMENT OF REPENTANCE

1. Necessity. The benefits of the Atonement are subject to the conditions prescribed by him who paid the price. The conditions include repentance. The requirement of repentance is one of the principal contrasts between the laws of God and the laws of man.

God has told us through his prophets that only those who repent are forgiven (see D&C 1:32; 58:42). Elder Bruce R. McConkie said it tersely: The Messiah brought “mercy to the repentant and justice to the unrepentant” (The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978], p. 337). Alma taught that “the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state” (Alma 42:13). Amulek said that “he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice” (Alma 34:16). Finally, in this dispensation our Redeemer declared, “If they would not repent they must suffer even as I” (D&C 19:17).

These eternal truths, fundamental in the doctrine of the restored gospel, explain why our church discipline is concerned with assisting a transgressor to repent. These truths also explain why evidence of repentance is the most important single factor in determining what church discipline is necessary to accomplish its principal purpose—to save the soul of the transgressor.

The redemptive function of church discipline and the revelation necessary for its implementation have no counterpart in the laws of man.

2. Confession. A second contrast concerns the role of the criminal’s or the transgressor’s confession.

Under the laws of man, a confession only serves the function of strong evidence of guilt. It is not essential because an accused person can be found guilty without a confession if the other evidence of guilt is sufficient.

Under the laws of God, a confession is absolutely essential because there is no repentance without confession. We read in 1 John, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9). And in modern revelation the Lord declared, “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:43; see also 61:2; 64:7).

Repentance begins when we recognize that we have done wrong. We might call this “confession to self.” This occurs, President Spencer W. Kimball said, when a person is willing “to convict himself of the transgression without soft-pedaling or minimizing the error, to be willing to face facts, meet the issue, and pay necessary penalties—and until the person is in this frame of mind he has not begun to repent” (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], p. 86).

The next step, for all our sins, is to confess them to the Lord in prayer.

In addition, when the sins are of a serious nature, they must be confessed to the priesthood leader designated by the Lord—the bishop or branch president or stake president. Elder Marion G. Romney described the sins that must be confessed to the bishop as those transgressions “of such a nature as would, unrepented of, put in jeopardy his right to membership or fellowship in the Church of Jesus Christ” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1955, p. 125). These last two confessions are what the Lord prescribed when he referred to “confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord” (D&C 59:12).

3. Restitution. A third contrast concerns restitution. Restitution is also an essential ingredient of repentance. Transgressors must do all they can to restore what their transgression has taken from

others. This includes confession to and seeking the forgiveness of those they have wronged. It also includes making the disclosures necessary to protect those who have been put in jeopardy by their wrongdoing. For example, they may need to alert other persons to health or safety hazards the wrongdoer's actions have created. As part of restitution, transgressors may also need to make disclosures to civil authorities and to accept the consequences.

Transgressors should look on the necessity for restitution—restoring what they have taken from others—as a privilege. Where restitution can be made, repentance is easier. Where the transgression is such that restitution is very difficult or even impossible, then repentance is also very difficult or even impossible. For example, the most serious sins include murder, adultery, and fornication. It is no coincidence that these are transgressions for which restitution is difficult or impossible. What this comparison means is that if something is wrong and it cannot be undone, never, never, never do it. I wish every young man or woman would understand and practice that simple and vital principle. This does not mean that we are free to do wrong things that can be repaired by restitution, like stealing. They are sins too. The point is that it is probably easier to repent of stealing, where you can make restitution, than it is to repent of something like sexual abuse, where you cannot make restitution.

Restitution has far less significance under the laws of man. While criminal courts will sometimes sentence a defendant to restore what he took from a victim, such restitution is, at best, an incidental concern of the punishment meted out by the judge of a criminal court.

4. Suffering. The fourth contrast, suffering, is probably the most misunderstood ingredient of repentance. This misunderstanding may result from the fact that there is a great gulf between the simple role of suffering under the laws of man and its very complex role under the laws of God.

The laws of man deliberately inflict punishment to make a criminal suffer for his crime. Punishment is a principal object of the laws of man. Criminal courts seek to make an offender “pay” for his wrongdoing, and this is done without regard to whether the offender is repentant or unrepentant.

Some have looked on church discipline in the same light. But the suggestion that a Church officer or a disciplinary council is supposed to punish a transgressor or make him suffer to pay for his wrongdoing misunderstands the purpose of church discipline and its relationship (and the relationship of suffering) to repentance, mercy, and the Atonement.

Unrepentant Transgressor. Under the law and justice of God, sinners are punished. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said he would “punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity” (Isaiah 26:21). Alma taught that God’s law could not exist “save there was a punishment,” and that there is “a punishment affixed” for every sin (Alma 42:17–18; see also Amos 3:1–2). Our second article of faith states our basic belief that men will be punished for their own sins.

Justice requires that the unrepentant transgressor suffer for his own sins. Perhaps the greatest statement of this principle in all the scriptures is the revelation the Lord gave to the Prophet Joseph Smith in March 1830, the month the Book of Mormon was published and the month before the Church was organized (see D&C 19). There the Lord reminded us of “the great day of judgment” when all will be judged according to their works. He explained that the “endless” or “eternal torment” or “punishment” that comes from sin is not punishment without end, but it is the punishment of God, who is endless and eternal (see vv. 3, 6, 10–12).

In this setting, the Savior of the world commanded us to repent and keep his commandments. “Repent,” he commanded, “lest . . . your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.

“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” (vv. 15–17).

Repentant transgressors. What about repentant transgressors? Are they punished? Must they suffer? The punishment that leads to repentance and the punishment that makes repentance possible must include suffering, but whose suffering is this—the sinner’s or the Savior’s?

Let us recall two scriptures: (1) Alma’s statement that “repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment” (Alma 42:16) and (2) the Savior’s revelation that he had “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).

Do these scriptures mean that a person who repents does not need to suffer at all because the entire punishment is borne by the Savior? That cannot be the meaning because it would be inconsistent with the Savior’s other teachings.

What is meant is that the person who repents does not need to suffer “even as” the Savior suffered for that sin. Sinners who are repenting will experience some suffering, but, because of their repentance and because of the Atonement, they will not experience the full “exquisite” extent of eternal torment the Savior suffered for that sin.

President Spencer W. Kimball, who gave such comprehensive teachings on repentance and forgiveness, said that personal suffering “is a very important part of repentance. One has not begun to repent until he has suffered intensely for his sins” (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p. 88).

“If a person hasn’t suffered, he hasn’t repented. . . . He has got to go through a change in his system whereby he suffers and then forgiveness is a possibility” (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p. 99).

Lehi taught this principle when he said that the Savior’s atoning sacrifice was for “all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered” (2 Nephi 2:7). The repentant sinner who comes to Christ with a broken heart and a contrite spirit has been through a process of personal pain and suffering for sin. He understands the meaning of Alma’s statement that “none but the truly penitent are saved” (Alma 42:24).

Bruce C. Hafen has described how some people think that repentance is too easy. He said they look “for short cuts and easy answers, thinking that quick confessions or breezy apologies alone are enough” (The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life’s Experiences [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1989], p. 150). President Kimball said, “Very frequently people think they have repented and are worthy of forgiveness when all they have done is to express sorrow or regret at the unfortunate happening” (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p. 87).

There is a big difference between the “godly sorrow [that] worketh repentance” (2 Corinthians 7:10), which involves personal suffering, and the easy and relatively painless sorrow for being caught, or the misplaced sorrow Mormon described as “the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin” (Mormon 2:13).

Alma the Younger certainly understood that easy and painless sorrow was not a sufficient basis for repentance. His experience, related in detail in the Book of Mormon, is our best scriptural illustration of the fact that the process of repentance is filled with personal suffering for sin.

Alma said that after he was stopped in his wicked course, he was “in the darkest abyss” (Mosiah 27:29), “racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.

“Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell” (Alma 36:12–13).

He told how “the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror” (v. 14). He spoke of being “harrowed up by the memory of [his] many sins” (v. 17). After three days and three nights of what he called “the most bitter pain and anguish of soul,” he cried out to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, and he received “a remission of [his] sins” (Alma 38:8).

All of our experience confirms the fact that we must endure personal suffering in the process of repentance—and for serious transgressions that suffering can be severe and prolonged. I believe that every one of us who is truly honest with himself or herself recognizes the truth of this principle. We have felt it in our own lives, and we have seen it in the lives of others.

We should also observe that our personal suffering for sin is private, not public. Often only the sinner and the Lord and the Lord’s servant know what is happening. In contrast to the public nature of the punishment inflicted by the laws of man, the suffering that leads to mercy under the laws of God is intensely personal.

The Savior. What about the suffering of the Savior? The laws of man obviously take no account of this.

Under the laws of God, the Savior’s suffering for sin is of supreme importance. The suffering that impels a transgressor toward repentance is his or her own suffering. But the suffering that satisfies the demands of justice for all repented transgressions is the suffering of our Savior and Redeemer. He suffered for the sins of all, “that they might not suffer if they would repent” (D&C 19:16). In the great words of Isaiah, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). If we will only repent, the Redeemer’s suffering has paid the price for our sins.

The Savior’s suffering is vastly different from every other suffering for sin. The suffering of the sinner is the suffering of the guilty. The suffering of the Savior was the suffering of the pure and sinless. His suffering was entirely undeserved. He was “wounded for our transgressions,” not his own. As the prophet Amulek explained, nothing short of “an infinite atonement” would suffice for the sins of the world (see Alma 34:12). And, as the Apostle Peter said, the blood that was shed and the sacrifice that was made to redeem us had to be “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19).

To summarize, the Atonement has no counterpart in the laws of man, and the laws of man take no account of the various elements of repentance and the different kinds of suffering that are accounted under the laws of God.

In contrast to the punishment that is the intended result of the judgment of a criminal court, the primary purpose of church discipline is to facilitate repentance—to qualify a transgressor for the mercy of God and the salvation made possible through the atonement of Jesus Christ. Personal suffering is inevitably part of that process, but personal suffering is not its purpose.

Church discipline is not an instrument of punishment, but a catalyst for change. The purpose of the personal suffering that must occur as part of the process of repentance is not to punish the transgressor, but to change him. The broken heart and contrite spirit required to “answer the ends of the law” (2 Nephi 2:7) introduce the repentant transgressor to the change necessary to conform his life to the pattern prescribed by his Redeemer. The major concern of the laws of God is to perfect the lives of his children.

Like wayward Corianton, some transgressors have difficulty understanding “the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner” (Alma 42:1). And they do not understand the conditions of mercy. “Why must I suffer at all?” they ask. “Now that I have said I am sorry, why can’t you just give me mercy and forget about this?” Such questions have some force under the laws of man. Under those laws, mercy can rob justice (as happens in the case of a pardon or executive clemency).

In contrast, under the laws of God mercy cannot rob justice. The sinner must repent or he must pay the full penalty of suffering for his own sins. The object of God’s laws is to save the sinner, not simply to punish him. Consequently, there is no exemption from the conditions a transgressor must meet to qualify for the mercy necessary for salvation. The repentant transgressor must be changed, and the conditions of repentance, including confession and personal suffering, are essential to accomplish that change. To exempt a transgressor from those conditions would deprive him of the change necessary for his salvation. That would be neither just nor merciful.

CHANGE OF LIFE

The final contrast between the laws of God and the laws of man concerns their different level of concern with a change of life.

We tend to think of the results of repentance as simply cleansing us from sin. That is an incomplete view of the matter. A person who sins is like a tree that bends easily in the wind. On a windy and rainy day the tree may bend so deeply against the ground that the leaves become soiled with mud, like sin. If we only focus on cleaning the leaves, the weakness in the tree that allowed it to bend and soil its leaves may remain. Merely cleansing the leaves does not strengthen the tree. Similarly, a person who is merely sorry to be soiled by sin will sin again in the next high wind. The susceptibility to repetition will continue until the tree has been strengthened.

When a person has gone through the process that results in what the scriptures call a broken heart and a contrite spirit, the Savior does more than cleanse that person from sin. He also gives him or her new strength. The new strength we receive from the Savior is essential for us to realize the purpose of our cleansing from sin, which is to return to our Heavenly Father. To be admitted to his presence, we must be more than clean. We must also be changed from a morally weak person who has transgressed into a strong person with the spiritual stature to dwell in the presence of God. We must, as the scripture says, “[become] a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). This is what the scripture means in its explanation that a person who has repented of sins will forsake them (see D&C 58:43). Forsaking sins is more than resolving not to repeat them. Forsaking involves a fundamental change in the individual.

King Benjamin and Alma both spoke of “a mighty change of heart.” King Benjamin’s congregation described that mighty change by saying that they had “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). Alma illustrated that change of heart when he described a people who “awoke unto God,” “put their trust in [him],” and were “faithful until the end” (Alma 5:7, 13). He challenged others to “look forward with an eye of faith” to the time when we will “stand before God to be judged” according to our deeds (v. 15). Persons who have had that change in their hearts have attained the strength and stature to dwell with God. That is what we call being saved.

Before I conclude, I wish to discuss two related subjects of special interest to young people, and therefore of vital importance to the men and women who teach them.

AVOID SIN

Some Latter-day Saints who wrongly think repentance is easy maintain that a little sinning will not hurt. Young people of this persuasion may say, "It is okay to have a few free ones, because it is easy to repent before your mission or marriage." The adult versions are more sophisticated and more pernicious. Perhaps some would even assert that a person is better off after he has sinned and repented. "Get a little experience with sin," one argument goes, "and then you will be better able to counsel and sympathize with sinners. You can always repent."

I plead with my brothers and sisters, my young friends and my older friends, avoid transgression! The idea that one can deliberately sin and easily repent or that one is better off after sinning and repenting are devilish lies of the adversary. Would anyone seriously contend that it is better to learn firsthand that a certain blow will break a bone or that a certain mixture of chemicals will explode and burn off our skin? Are we better off after we have sustained and then scarred over from such injuries? It is obviously better to heed the warnings of wise persons who know the effects of certain traumas on our bodies.

Just as we can benefit from someone else's experience in matters such as these, we can also benefit from the warnings contained in the commandments of God. We do not have to have personal experience with the effects of serious transgressions to know that they are injurious to our souls and destructive of our eternal welfare.

Some years ago one of our sons asked me why it was not a good idea to try alcohol and tobacco to see what they were like. He knew about the Word of Wisdom and he also knew the health effects of these substances, but he was questioning why he should not just try them out for himself. I replied that if he wanted to try something out he ought to go to a barnyard and eat a little manure. He recoiled in horror. "Ooh, that's gross," he reacted.

"I'm glad you think so," I said, "but why don't you just try it out so you will know for yourself? While you are proposing to try one thing that you know is not good for you, why don't you apply that principle to some others?" That illustration of the silliness of "trying it out for yourself" proved persuasive to one sixteen-year-old.

HOPE VERSUS DISCOURAGEMENT

I spoke earlier of persons who think that repentance is too easy. There are many such among the young. At the opposite extreme are those who think that repentance is too hard. Our youth include many of these also. This group of souls are so tender-hearted and conscientious that they see sin everywhere in their own lives, and they despair of ever being able to be clean. A call for repentance that is clear enough and loud enough to encourage reformation by the lenient can produce paralyzing discouragement in the conscientious. The dose of doctrine that is strong enough to penetrate the hard shell of the easygoing group may prove to be a massive overdose for the conscientious. This is a common problem. Teachers address a diverse audience each time they speak, and we are never free from the reality that a doctrinal underdose for some is an overdose for others.

As teachers of youth, we must make a special effort to counteract the discouragement and despair that Satan uses so skillfully to overpower the struggling. President Ezra Taft Benson gave inspired counsel on this subject. Writing in the *Ensign* in the first year of his presidency, under the title "Do Not Despair," he said:

We live in an age when, as the Lord foretold, men's hearts are failing them, not only physically but

in spirit. (See D&C 45:26.) Many are giving up heart for the battle of life. Suicide ranks as a major cause of deaths of college students. As the show-down between good and evil approaches with its accompanying trials and tribulations, Satan is increasingly striving to overcome the Saints with despair, discouragement, despondency, and depression.

Yet, of all people, we as Latter-day Saints should be the most optimistic and the least pessimistic. For while we know that ‘peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion,’ we are also assured that ‘the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst’ (D&C 1:35–36). (Oct. 1986, p. 2).

President Benson then reviewed a dozen ways we can combat despondency, including repentance, prayer, service, priesthood blessings, wholesome music, and just plain endurance. On that last suggestion he gave this memorable advice: “There are times when you simply have to righteously hang on and outlast the devil until his depressive spirit leaves you” (“Do Not Despair,” p. 5).

I like that. I think it will appeal to your young students also. Give them the prophet’s ways to combat discouragement and despair, and then tell them there will be times when they just have to “outlast the devil.” If that is their only recourse, the Lord will help them succeed by that means.

One of Satan’s most potent techniques of discouragement is to deny the power of the Atonement by persuading a sinner that God cannot or will not forgive him or her. Or, he may seek to persuade a sinner that he is so depraved that he must not forgive himself. We should teach the discouraged that part of the process of repentance is to let go of our sins, to yield them up to God and follow his example by forgiving ourselves as he forgave us.

In conclusion, President Benson said: “We can rise above the enemies of despair, depression, discouragement, and despondency by remembering that God provides righteous alternatives, some of which I have mentioned. As it states in the Bible, ‘There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it’ (1 Cor. 10:13).” (“Do Not Despair,” p. 5).

I hope you will help your students feel their relationship to God, feel his concern for them, and feel his love for them. That love is manifest in the Atonement, and we accept that love when we practice the principle of repentance.

Repentance is a continuing process, needed by all because “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Teach your students that full repentance is possible and that thereafter forgiveness is certain.

How precious the promise that God will take “away the guilt from our hearts, through the merits of his Son” (Alma 24:10).

How comforting the promise that “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

How glorious God’s own promise that “he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more” (D&C 58:42; see also Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:12).

By his atoning sacrifice our Savior brought about what Amulek called “the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice” (Alma 34:15).

The relationship between justice and mercy and the Atonement is nowhere more succinctly or more beautifully expressed than by Eliza R. Snow in the fifth verse of that wonderful hymn “How Great the

Wisdom and the Love”:

How great, how glorious, how complete,
Redemption’s grand design,
Where justice, love, and mercy meet
In harmony divine!
(Hymns, no. 195)

And so we join our voices with the prophet Jacob, who declared that “my soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord . . . in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death” (2 Nephi 11:5). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

COMPARISON OF MAN’S AND GOD’S METHODS

Subject	Laws of God	Laws of Man
<i>Justice</i>	●	●
<i>Mercy</i>	●	◉
<i>Atonement</i>	●	○
Requirement for Repentance	●	○
Confession	●	◉
Restitution	●	◉
<i>Suffering</i>		
The Transgressor’s		●
Unrepentant	●	○
Repentant	◉	○
The Savior’s	●	○
Change of Life	●	◉

● major concern
 ◉ minor concern
 ○ not a concern

believing christ

STEPHEN ROBINSON + APRIL 1992

One of the most terrifying dilemmas in the universe consists of two facts. The first is expressed in Doctrine and Covenants 1:31: “I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance.” That means he can’t tolerate it. He can’t blink or look the other way. The other fact is very simply put: We all sin. If the equation consisted of only those two facts, the conclusion would be inescapable: As sinful beings, we can never enter God’s presence.

But that is not all there is. There is the atonement of Jesus Christ—that glorious plan by which this dilemma can be resolved. And the amazing thing is that the Atonement works in practical ways.

BELIEVING CHRIST

When my son Michael was six or seven, he did something I thought was wrong. He is my only son, and I want him to be better than his dad was. So when he slipped up, I sent him to his room with the instructions, “Don’t you dare come out until I come and get you!”

And then I forgot. Some hours later, as I was watching television, I heard his door open and tentative footsteps coming down the hall. I slapped my forehead and ran to meet him. There he was with swollen eyes and tears on his cheeks. He looked up at me—not quite sure he should have come out—and said, “Dad, can’t we ever be friends again?” I melted and pulled him to me. He’s my boy, and I love him.

We all do things that disappoint our Father in Heaven, that separate us from his presence, his Spirit. There are times when we get sent to our rooms, spiritually though not physically. When that happens, we sometimes lift up our eyes and say, “O Father, can’t we ever be friends again?” The answer, found in all the scriptures, is a resounding “Yes—through the atonement of Christ.” I particularly like the way it is put in Isaiah 1:18:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.

To have faith in Jesus Christ is not merely to believe that he is who he says he is. It is not merely to believe in Christ; we must also believe Christ. Both as a bishop and as a teacher, I have heard several variations on a theme of doubt. Some have said, “Bishop, I’ve sinned too horribly. I’ll be active in the Church, and I hope for some reward. But I couldn’t ever hope to be exalted after what I’ve done.” Others have said, “I’m weak and imperfect. I don’t have all the talents that Brother Jones (or Sister Smith) does. I’ll never be the bishop (or the Relief Society president). I’m just average. I expect my reward in eternity will be a little lower than theirs.”

All of these are variations on the same theme: “I do not believe Christ can do what he claims. I have no faith in his ability to exalt me.”

I once counseled a man who said, “Bishop, I’m just not celestial material.” Well, I’d heard those words once too often, so I said, “You’re not celestial material? Welcome to the club. Not one of us is! Not one of us qualifies on our own for the presence of God. So why don’t you admit your real problem? Why don’t you admit that you don’t believe Christ can do what he says he can do?”

He got angry. “I have a testimony of Jesus!”

I said, “Yes, you believe in Christ. You simply do not believe Christ. He says that even though you are not celestial, he can make you celestial—but you don’t believe it.”

WHY HE IS CALLED THE SAVIOR

Sometimes the demand for perfection drives us to despair. More than a decade ago, my wife and I were living in Pennsylvania. Things seemed to be going well. I’d been promoted in my work and was also serving in the bishopric. Janet had given birth to our fourth child, had graduated from college, had passed the CPA exam, and had been called to serve as Relief Society president. We were busy but happy, and I thought we were doing the right things.

Then my wife began to feel an overpowering sense of discouragement. She asked to be released from her callings, and try as I might, I could not get her to tell me what was wrong.

One night, after two weeks of being prodded by a sometimes insensitive but worried husband, she finally said, “All right. You want to know what’s wrong? I can’t do it anymore. I can’t get up at 5:30 in the morning to bake bread and help my kids with their homework and do my own homework. I can’t do my Relief Society stuff and get my genealogy done and sew and go to the PTA meetings and write the missionaries. ...”

She added, “I don’t have the talent that Sister Morrell has. I can’t do what Sister Childs does. I try not to yell at the kids, but I do. I’m not perfect, and I’m never going to be perfect. I’m afraid I’m not going to make it to the celestial kingdom.”

I said, “Janet, I know you have a testimony. ...”

“Of course I do! That’s what’s so terrible. I know the gospel’s true. I just can’t do it. I’ve tried and I’ve tried, but I can’t do it all, all of the time.”

It was a long night. At last we came to understand what was wrong. We realized, after talking together, that Janet was trying to save herself. She knew that Jesus is an adviser and a teacher. She knew that he is an example, the head of the Church, our Elder Brother, and even God. She knew all that, but she did not understand His role as the Savior.

We all fail at living the full celestial level. That’s why we need a Savior. The Lord says, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” (Matt. 5:6.) We frequently misinterpret that verse. We think it means “Blessed are the righteous.” It does not. When are you hungry? When are you thirsty? When you don’t have the object of your desire. It is those who don’t have the righteousness that God has—but who hunger and thirst after it—who are blessed, for if that is the desire of their hearts, the Lord will help them achieve it.

BECOMING ONE WITH CHRIST

Perfection comes through the atonement of Jesus Christ. That happens as we become one with him, a perfect being. It is like a merger. If you take a small, bankrupt firm that is about to go under and merge it with a corporate giant, what happens? Their assets and liabilities flow together, and the new entity that is created is solvent.

This is similar to what happens spiritually when we enter into a covenant with the Savior. We have liabilities; he has assets. So he proposes a covenant relationship. Jesus is sometimes called the Bridegroom and the Church the Bride, because of their close association under the covenant. After the covenant is made, I become one with Christ, and as partners we work together toward my exaltation. My

liabilities and his assets flow into each other. I do all that I can do, and he does what I cannot yet do. For now, in partnership we are perfect, through His perfection.

What heavier burden is there than the demand we sometimes place on ourselves to be perfect now, in this life? But Jesus proposes:

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:28–30.)

TRUST ME

Nephi was one of the great prophets, yet he recognized his need for the Savior. In 2 Nephi 4:17–18, we read of his anguish: “O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of my flesh; my soul grieveth because of mine iniquities.

I am encompassed about, because of the temptations and the sins which do so easily beset me. (2 Ne. 4:17–18)

Did Nephi understand his mortal condition?

Oh, yes. But the key to his greatness is what comes next:

Nevertheless, I know in whom I have trusted. (2 Ne. 4:19)

I had a friend who used to say frequently, “Well, I figure my life is half over and I’m halfway to the celestial kingdom, so I’m right on schedule.”

One day I asked her, “What happens if you die tomorrow?” It was the first time the thought had occurred to her.

“Let’s see, halfway to the celestial kingdom is ... mid-terrestrial! That’s not good enough!”

We need to know that because of the covenant we have made with the Savior, if we should die tomorrow, we still have hope of the celestial kingdom. That hope is one of the promised blessings of our covenant relationship. Yet many of us do not understand that promise or take advantage of it.

When our twin daughters were young, Janet and I decided to teach them to swim. I started with Rebekah. As we went down into the public pool together, I thought, “I’m going to teach her to swim.” But she thought, “I’m going to drown!” The water was only three and one-half feet deep, but Becky was only three feet tall. She was so terrified that she began to scream and kick. She was unteachable.

Finally, I held her close and said, “Becky, I’ve got you. I’m your dad. I love you. I’m not going to let anything bad happen to you. Now relax.” And bless her heart, she relaxed. She trusted me. I put my arms under her and said, “Okay, now kick your legs.” And she began to learn how to swim.

Spiritually, some of us are so terrified by the questions “Am I celestial? Am I going to make it?” that we cannot make any progress. We’re petrified by our fear. But if we’re trying to follow his teachings and paying attention, we can almost feel the Savior’s arms around us and feel those assurances as the Spirit whispers of the Savior’s love for us: I love you. Trust me. And if we do trust him, he can begin to help us live the gospel. It is as if he supports us, whispering through the Spirit: Okay, now attend sacrament meeting. Very good. Now accept a call to serve. And so we begin to make progress.

Alma 34:14–16 makes it clear that Christ’s atonement was infinite and eternal. As such, it enables mercy to overpower justice so we can have the faith to repent. “And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles [us] in the arms of safety.”

“The arms of safety”—that is my favorite phrase from the Book of Mormon.

Do Latter-day Saints believe in being saved? Of course we do. That’s why Jesus is called the Savior. What good is it to have a Savior if no one is saved? It’s like having a lifeguard that won’t get out of the chair.

The great truth of the gospel is that we have a Savior who can and will save us from ourselves, from what we lack, from our imperfections, from the carnality within us, if we seek his help. In vision, Joseph Smith described those in the celestial kingdom in these terms:

*These are they whose names are written in heaven, where God and Christ are the judge of all.
·These are they who are just men made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.
(D&C 76:68–69.)*

Just men and women—those who hunger and thirst after righteousness—made perfect through Jesus Christ, our mediator.

GIVE HIM ALL

As my wife and I talked that night about feelings of inadequacy, I groped for some way to help. I finally remembered something that had happened a couple of months earlier. In our home it is now called the parable of the bicycle.

I was sitting in a chair reading. My daughter, Sarah, who was seven years old at the time, came in and said, “Dad, can I have a bike? I’m the only kid on the block who doesn’t have one.”

Well, I didn’t have the money then for a bike, so I stalled her. I said, “Sure, Sarah.”

She said, “How? When?”

I said, “You save all your pennies, and soon you’ll have enough for a bike.” And she went away.

A couple of weeks later I was sitting in the same chair when I heard a “clink, clink” in Sarah’s bedroom. I asked, “Sarah, what are you doing?”

She came to me with a little jar, a slit cut in the lid, and a bunch of pennies in the bottom. She said, “You promised me that if I saved all my pennies, pretty soon I’d have enough for a bike. And, Daddy, I’ve saved every single one of them.”

My heart melted. My daughter was doing everything in her power to follow my instructions. I hadn’t actually lied to her. If she saved all of her pennies, she would eventually have enough for a bike, but by then she would want a car. I said, “Let’s go look at bikes.”

We went to every store in town. Finally we found it—the perfect bicycle. She was thrilled. Then she saw the price tag, and her face fell. She started to cry. “Oh, Dad, I’ll never have enough for a bicycle!”

So I said, “Sarah, how much do you have?”

She answered, “Sixty-one cents.”

“I’ll tell you what. You give me everything you’ve got and a hug and a kiss, and the bike is yours.” Then I drove home very slowly because she insisted on riding the bike home.

As I drove beside her, I thought of the atonement of Christ. We all desperately want the celestial kingdom. We want to be with our Father in Heaven. But no matter how hard we try, we come up short. At some point all of us must realize, “I can’t do this by myself. I need help.” Then it is that the Savior says, in effect, All right, you’re not perfect. But what can you do? Give me all you have, and

I'll do the rest.

He still requires our best effort. We must keep trying. But the good news is that having done all we can, it is enough. We may not be personally perfect yet, but because of our covenant with the Savior, we can rely on his perfection, and his perfection will get us through.

As Janet and I internalized how the Atonement works, we wept. "I've always believed that Jesus suffered and died for me," Janet said. "But now I realize that he must save me from myself, from my sins and my weaknesses."

I rejoice in the words of 2 Nephi 2:8: "There is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah." There is no other way. Many of us are trying to save ourselves, holding the atonement of Jesus Christ at arm's distance and saying, "When I've perfected myself, then I'll be worthy of the Atonement." But that's not how it works. That's like saying, "I won't take the medicine until I'm well. I'll be worthy of it then."

One of my favorite hymns reads: "Dearly, dearly has he loved! And we must love him too, and trust in his redeeming blood, and try his works to do." ("There Is a Green Hill Far Away," *Hymns*, 1985, no. 194.)

Truly, we must try to do his works with all that is in us. But then, having done all, we can trust in his redeeming blood to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

If we will enter into that glorious covenant Jesus offers us and give him all that we have, holding nothing back, trusting in his ability to make up for what we lack, he will exalt us. With him pulling with and for us, we can move forward in confidence toward our celestial home.

the problems of theism and the love of god

BLAKE OSTLER • 2006

7

THE COMPASSION THEORY OF ATONEMENT

God's Compassion in Atonement

I call the framework of concepts of atonement found in LDS scripture the “com-passion” view of atonement because compassion etymologically means to “feel in union with.” It is two words: “com” from the Latin *cum*, meaning “to be with,” and “passion,” meaning to be moved by or feel with. The purpose of the Atonement is to overcome our alienation by creating compassion, a life shared in union where we are moved by our love for each other. “The Passion” also refers to Christ’s suffering—and thus com-passion is to share in Christ’s suffering and he in ours, that we might share also in the unsurpassable joy of each others’ lives. I also want to be clear that the theory that I propose here will undoubtedly be controversial among many Latter-day Saints because they accept the traditional views that I critique.

The compassion theory can be summarized as follows: The purpose of the atonement in LDS scripture is to “bring about the bowels of mercy” so that God is moved with compassion for us and we are moved with gratitude to trust him by opening our hearts to him. The result of the Atonement is that we are free to choose to turn back to God, and he is free to accept us into a relationship of shared life. Atonement removes, casts out, and releases the guilt that alienates us; and it also brings us together into shared life. When we let go of our past and release the painful energy of alienation, Christ experiences that release and receives into himself the pain that we have experienced to be transformed by the light of his love. If we refuse to let go of our past histories and the pain that arises from our sins, we will continue to experience that pain. If we let go of that pain; however, then Christ experiences the very pain that we release, but we no longer have to. In his Passion we find

compassion. He literally feels our pains and is thereby filled with compassion for us. In this sense, Christ suffers for our sins and bears our iniquities.

We can begin to unpack what is entailed in scriptural statements such as “Christ took upon himself the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 11:11) or “Christ was slain for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 11:14) by looking again at Doctrine & Covenants 19 regarding the pain that Christ suffers in Gethsemane (at least I assume it refers to suffering primarily in Gethsemane because it refers to Luke 22:24 which refers to Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane):

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;

Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—

Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. (D&C 19:16–19)

At least the following claims seem to be made in this scripture: (1) Christ suffers pain for our sins; (2) We do not have to suffer what he suffers for our sins if we repent; (3) If we don’t repent, we will suffer for our sins just the way that Christ suffers for them if we do repent; (4) by suffering as a result of our sins, Christ fulfills the will of the Father with respect to his mortal life; and (5) Christ had a choice about whether he would accept this suffering into his life. I would add that this scripture, together with the notion of “infinite atonement” suggests that Christ’s suffering is infinite. I take it to mean that there is no limit or merciful threshold to the amount and degree of Christ’s suffering for our sins. Because he suffers for all the sins of all people, his suffering is magnified and is literally unlimited. However, it is imperative to note that Christ doesn’t simply suffer for our sins regardless of what we do; if we don’t repent, we will suffer for our sins. It would be unjust if suffering were doubled so that I suffer for my sins and Christ suffers as a result of my sins also. If we do repent, however, then we don’t suffer for our sins but Christ suffers as a consequence of our sins of which we repent. It is also important to note that, in this scripture, what Christ suffers is not vicarious guilt or punishment; rather, he suffers the *pain* of our sins that we will feel if we don’t repent.

Thus, this view of atonement presupposes that the pain Christ feels in Gethsemane is occasioned by sharing our experience—by

being united with us in shared life. LDS scriptures claim that Christ literally feels our pain because the real energy of pain that we have held onto has been released by us through repentance to be transferred to him. The pain is then eradicated because this energy of pain for sins that he takes into himself is carried by him to the cross where it is extinguished in the death of Christ's flesh on the cross. The picture or verbal expression of this reality seems to be that the energy of sins that we have transferred to Christ is received to be carried in his flesh and mortal life; and in the death of his mortal body the energy is destroyed. Or in the alternative, the pain of our sins that he carries in his mortal life is transformed by his love. The dark energy of sin that we have enclosed behind the walls of our hard hearts is released when we open our hearts and the light of Christ enters into our hearts to dwell. We experience a mighty change of heart and are delivered from the most excruciating pain and darkness to the most exquisite joy and light. As Alma the Younger exclaimed: "My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and the bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My souls was racked with eternal torment; but I am snatched, and my soul is pained no more" (Mosiah 27:29).

Distinctive Claims of the Compassion Theory of Atonement

I claim that the LDS scriptures present a view of the Atonement that is not elucidated in any of the historical theories of atonement—although perhaps it has been anticipated by someone else, and I am ignorant of that fact. Nevertheless, this view of atonement is not new or unique because it seems to me to be a pre-theoretical assumption regarding Christ's suffering as atonement for sins throughout the New Testament. His suffering is not merely the suffering of bodily pain. He suffers for our sins. The reason that the LDS view goes beyond the conventional view is that LDS scriptures view the Atonement as being supremely exemplified in Gethsemane where the Gospel of Luke (but none of the other Gospels) states that Christ was in such agony that "his sweat was as if it were great drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). LDS scripture views this agony in Gethsemane as more than pain

resulting from anticipatory dread of the crucifixion to come. Rather, at that moment he experienced being united with us in the sense that he felt the pain that we experience as a result of our own sins. However, because he felt this pain, the pain has been “atoned” and we no longer feel it if we choose to believe in him. Such a view of the Atonement seems to entail that he experiences our very experience of pain arising from the sins that we have committed, both the psychic pain that results from a guilty conscience and the pain and dis-ease that we create in our bodies as a result of choosing to alienate ourselves and holding onto grudges, blame, resentment, and hatred. If we release this pain through repentance that we have held within ourselves, then he feels this pain but we don’t experience it any longer for the simple reason that we have let go of it.

The compassion theory sees atonement as a reciprocal reconciliation of our alienation. That is, the Atonement not only reconciles us to God, but also reconciles God to us. It not only results from our choice to be in relation to God, but also from his prior choice to be in relation with us. The suffering that Christ experienced not only moves us with compassion for him, but it also moves him with compassion for us. In the Atonement he not only becomes what we are, but he also brings us to be what he is. Atonement thus unites us and reconciles our alienation that we have freely chosen.

Reconciling Humans to God

The compassion theory explains the impact of Christ’s suffering love on us. Underlying the approach of LDS scripture to atonement is the recognition that our alienation from God and each other arises from free agency or self-determination—the free choices that we all make to cast ourselves out of God’s presence (Alma 42:2–3). The starting point for Alma’s exposition of atonement is that we all, like Adam, freely chose to leave God’s presence. It is noteworthy that Alma’s discussion of atonement presupposes human preexistence in the sense that all humankind has chosen to be cut off from God’s presence by becoming mortal. That is also precisely the view taught by Joseph Smith; we freely choose to leave God’s presence to experience mortality. The purpose of this choice is also significant. We choose to become mortal so that we can learn from our experiences, but the primary purpose of mortal life is to place

us on probation in the sense that we are granted a time to choose to freely enter into relationship with God (Alma 42:4). The purpose of mortal life is freely chosen love. As a necessary condition to choose love freely, we choose to leave the cognitive awareness of God's immediate presence so that we can choose God and learn about love in an environment where we will be challenged by opposition and evil. Love that is freely chosen must leave the beloved free to choose whether to have the relationship. In this sense, there is a risk that we could be lost because we are free to choose to reject a relationship with God.

I have argued that our choice to be alienated from God arises from self-betrayal when we fail to fulfill the law of love that calls us constantly to serve and be with others. Our self-betrayal leads us to seek to justify ourselves; and to show that we are really good, even though we fail to do what we feel we ought to do, we engage in self-deception. Like Adam, when we realize that we have transgressed the law, we choose to hide ourselves from God in the self-deceived belief that we can hide from him not merely what we have done but who we are. Alma and Amulek insist that this self-deception is exposed by the universality of judgment by works. We will reap what we sow and have restored to us what we send out to others. This is a universal law and fact about human experience that cannot be escaped. We cannot be with God if we are not holy like him. We cannot have the blessings of love in intimate relationship with others unless we freely choose to show our love in action. Nevertheless, we have all transgressed the law of love. We have all engaged in self-deception to hide our failure to love from ourselves. However, rather than immediately execute judgment that banishes us from God's presence forever, God has mercifully chosen to grant to us a period of time in which we can repent. Repentance is the act of choosing to end conduct that causes us to be alienated from God and to return to him. The Atonement accomplishes its purposes by making us free to choose for ourselves whether we will walk back into God's loving embrace. The Atonement makes it possible for us to repent.

A key concept of the compassion theory of atonement is that we are enabled to repent and be freed from sin by Christ's atoning love. The key problem of sin in LDS scripture is self-deception. We engage in self-deception to protect our ego-based existence from

being exposed as an inadequate facade. We seek to protect our egos to avoid the pain that arises from a sense of unworthiness and inadequacy. To protect ourselves from the pain of unworthiness and inadequacy we harden ourselves to others so that we are not vulnerable to them and their judgments of us. The atonement enables us to let go of the need for an ego or self-image that we seek to protect by breaking through the barrier of our hard heart. The Atonement breaks through our self-absorbed ego by opening up a space for us to choose to soften our hearts. Our hearts are softened when we see the truth about ourselves, stripped of self-betrayal and self-deception. The truth is that we have all violated the law of love in so many heinous ways that it is literally sickening. The amazing truth is that, despite ourselves, we are loved and accepted just because we are who and what we are. In this sense, we are justified and deemed worthy of God's universal love as a matter of grace. The grace of Christ's love, manifested in his life and way of being with us, works in us to persuade us to soften the hardened exterior that we create to protect our tender hearts. When we truly realize that God himself has become what we are and that he loves us so much that he is willing to be in relationship with us even though it causes him extensive and intense suffering, we can be persuaded by his compassion for us to soften our hearts and open up to receive him. His compassion for us begets our compassion for him. When we open to him, we move beyond empathetic love to compassionate love wherein we live our lives in each other because we share the union of life.

We are also made free to choose for ourselves because we are empowered to accept the relationship that is offered to us freely as a matter of grace. Lehi asserts in 2 Nephi 2:26 that "the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good and evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon." The result of the Atonement is that we are made free. We cannot accept what is not given to us. We are enabled to accept God's offer of relationship because he has made the first move and invited us to accept him. We are free to choose because God has given us this life as a time of probation to decide whether we will choose to be in relationship with him and the extent to which we will identify our purposes and wills with his.

We are free to choose life by accepting Christ's life into us through the power of redemption, or to choose death by refusing to accept the life that has been given to us. If we choose life, then we are freed from our past to move forward into life lived as an opportunity to learn from our experiences in mortality and to grow from the opposition that we encounter along the way. If we choose death, then we are stuck in the past, doomed to forever repeat, over and over again, the same mistakes and to wallow in the pain and misery of alienating sin. God loves us so much that he leaves the choice up to us, for only in this way can the relationship we seek be a loving interpersonal relationship. Above all, God seeks our free choice to reciprocate his love with our own and to give the gift that we have uniquely to give in the entire universe—the gift of ourselves.

Our faith in Christ is thus the means by which we appropriate the Atonement in the sense that only by trusting him to be faithful are we able to let go of the past ways of being that we created to protect our egos from further injury. In the presence of his gracious love, our egos are superfluous and can be abandoned so that we see ourselves as we are seen by him and know ourselves as we are known by him—as worthy of loving acceptance and reconciliation. Having seen ourselves in the mirror of his love, we are moved with compassion to repent by ceasing to do what alienates us, to let go of whatever keeps us from being with him, and to do all within our power to show our love out of sheer gratitude to him. Thus, repentance entails not only turning to God, but doing whatever we can to repair the harm that we have done to our relationships with him and those we have injured by our failure to love. When we grasp that he was willing to give his mortal life so that his life or *zoe* could dwell in us, willing to feel the very pain of the guilt that we feel for the sins that we have committed, willing to accept us even though we have despised him—then we can fall at his feet, moistening them with our tears of contrition and repentance, and sharing the joy known only to those whose hearts he has entered as the triumphal king. Then the kingdom of God shall reside in our hearts because his will is done on earth as it is in heaven. In the

presence of such love, we are inspired to praise him and glorify him because he is so great that he can not only love us, just we are, but also enter into our lives to transform us into what he is through shared life.

Reconciling God to Humans

The compassion theory that is inspired by LDS scriptures (and the Old and New Testaments) focuses not merely on how we are reconciled to God but also on how he is reconciled to us. By becoming human, Christ learns something that enables him to move forward and to further reconciliation. Throughout the Old Testament, God is merciful in his covenant-love to Israel despite Israel's constant and repeated unfaithfulness to him. Such unfaithfulness caused him pain like the anguish we feel when a spouse is unfaithful or we are rejected by our own children. Sending prophets and messengers was not enough to effect reconciliation in the face of constant infidelity; God actually took the radical step of becoming mortal and walking among us to show us how a life of loving reconciliation is lived. Yet Christ learned something by becoming mortal that he did not previously know experientially. He learned how to succor his people: "He will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, *that he may know according to the flesh how to succor* his people in their infirmities" (Alma 7:12). Does such a view imply that he didn't know how to succor his people before his mortality? It does in the sense that he didn't know how to succor his people *according to the flesh*. I take this phrase to mean that Christ learned what can be learned only from direct experience in the flesh—what it is to feel pain, fatigue, suffering, and alienation. There is a dimension to knowledge that is logically available only through such immediate corporeal experience. Like us, he became mortal to learn from his experience.

God is moved with compassion for us because he directly experiences our alienation and suffers the bodily pains and temptations that we suffer. To be mortal is to be heir to alienation and bodily suffering. They cannot be escaped.

Nor do I want to understate the seriousness of human sin that God reconciles through his atonement. The reality of the Atonement can be appreciated only in the light of radical sin. The Atonement reconciles us to God even in the face of evils so heinous

that it rips our hearts from our chests when we stare that evil in the face. Some parents abuse their own children by beating them, starving them, abandoning them, or verbally berating them. A little Jewish girl named Zosia had her eyes ripped out of their sockets by a German commander because he thought that they were beautiful and he wanted to make rings for his wife out of them.¹ Only with the screaming pain of that little girl as the eyes are ripped out of her head and she slowly dies in agony, and the horror and subsequent madness of her mother who watched as it happened, can bring us face to face with the reality of atonement for sin. For the atonement is God's response to the problem of evil—not only the very human evil of my failure to help my wife with the children when she asks, but the inhuman evil of the Holocaust and the unfathomable depth of human inhumanity. How can God dare to love that German officer? What right does he have to forgive him? Yet Christ asked the Father to forgive those who nailed him to a Roman cross—even in the moment that he felt abandoned by the Father. The depth of this love and willingness to forgive us is unfathomable. It is the love of the Atonement.

Because God himself in Christ descended below all things, we cannot complain that he does not know, cannot comprehend, cannot be with us in our suffering and alienation from God. Jesus experienced alienation from God to the extent that he felt abandoned in words so poignant that they had to be preserved in the Aramaic in which he spoke them—*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*. “My God, my God, why hast thou abandoned me?” There is no call to his *abba* or heavenly papa in this moment—Jesus used the words of the Psalmist to express his sense of having been abandoned. It is appropriate that Jesus here quotes a mere human—for he experienced alienation and abandonment as a mortal just as we do. To the extent that sin consists of existing in a state of alienation, Jesus participated in sin in this moment of alienation and abandonment (although it does not follow that Jesus sinned by causing the alienation or that he was morally culpable).

Nor do I want to focus alone on the atrocities committed by the Germans in World War II. Many other atrocities in human history parallel these in sheer depravity. We all make Christ suffer with unbearable pain because we fail to live the law of love. God is

reconciled to us and we are reconciled to him because he experienced pain for our sins. One of the key purposes of the compassion theory of atonement is to explain how it is that Christ suffers for our sins in a way that is faithful to scripture but which does not involve the non-scriptural idea that the Father punished Christ as a substitute for the punishment that we deserve as a means of satisfying (or propitiating) his anger against us. I now turn to that task.

Christ's Suffering as a Result of Our Sins

An explanation of Christ's atoning suffering in LDS scripture begins with a recognition that the effects of sin somehow remain in us. Sins affect not merely the way we act, but our very being. One of the key concepts of the compassion theory of the Atonement is that we harbor an energy of sin that remains within us unless and until we repent. In explicating the effects of sin that remain in our being, I utilize the notion of "energies" prominent in Patristic descriptions of union, atonement, and theosis.² However, the energy that I have in mind is the divine energy that vivifies and gives us life. The Greek term *zwh* (*zoe*) translated as "life" has a specialized meaning in scripture. It refers to the energy of life that God gives to be in us as a new life, an energy of absolute fullness of life and a completion and vibrancy coupled with eternal power and joy. The life-energy or *zoe* that we receive in the Atonement is the divine life that glorifies and exalts. The "energies" of God are the flow of the divine energy of life, the movement of the Spirit, and the light that proceeds from God to fill the immensity of space. In Doctrine & Covenants 88:11–13, the light of God that enters into us is conceived as an "energy" that gives life, actuates, invigorates, vivifies, and enlightens. The force that animates us and gives us life is an energy that originated with God. It is like the energy that God breathed into us (<Greek script>—*pneuma* translated as spirit, life, breath, wind) to give us life. The light that "proceeds from God's presence" to "give us light," that "enlightens our eyes" and "quickens our understandings," "which gives life to all things" is a form of energy that is given by God to penetrate within us (D&C 88:11–13). In LDS scripture, the degree of light that gives life to our bodies defines the glory that we enjoy (D&C 88:25–32).

In LDS thought, evil is the opposition to good and the opposite of life. Sin also has its own energy—the energy of being damned or stopped in progress, of impeding the movement and energy of life. The scriptures view our responsibility for evil acts as something that remains with us after we do the act. It is “uncleanness” or a “stain” on our soul. Metaphorically, this stain or uncleanness can be washed away through the Atonement. However, it is obviously only a metaphor. There is a sense in which guilt adheres in our being until it is atoned for. Moreover, guilt is something that causes us psychic and psychosomatic pain. Prior to repenting, we suffer from alienation and the pain that comes from our self-enclosed existence in self-deception. Moreover, when we hold onto our self-deception, we blame others for our painful condition and we judge them. We refuse to forgive others and hold onto grudges, resentment, and judgment. In living such an alienated life, we create a real energy that remains in our “flesh” in the sense that we have a “psychosomatic memory” of it. The damage that we do to ourselves through sin is literally stored in our bodies in the form of painful memories and disease. Our bodies manifest the energy of such pain in the form of heart disease, high blood pressure, ulcers, and all kinds of psychosomatic illnesses and manifestations of our neuroses. The pain of a guilty conscience is real. For pain is an experience; and by the mere fact of being experienced, it is shown to be real pain. Moreover, the LDS scriptures state repeatedly that our flesh is sinful.³ It is the source of not only passions and drives that tempt us, but also the locus where we store the memories and molecular and electro-chemical energy that manifests itself in so many illnesses.

Thus, it seems to me that sinful conduct causes us to feel guilt and pain for what we have done—and this guilt and pain is a form of energy. I will refer to it as the energy of sin. This energy is “real” in the sense that it causes real effects in our minds and bodies. It seems necessary that anything that can cause such effects is a form of energy because it brings about real change in us. What isn’t real as energy couldn’t cause anything.

According to the compassion theory of atonement, the energy of sin that we harbor within us is released in repentance and the pain caused by this energy therefore ceases when we repent. Repentance

consist of letting go of the anger, grudges, refusal to forgive others, habits, and patterns of conduct that injure our relationships with others or create alienation. The transfer of this life-energy when we enter into union with Christ goes both ways. It is not merely that Christ enters into us; we also enter into Christ. The union of atonement is a reconciliation effected by bringing us to willingly choose to enter into a relationship of indwelling love with the Father through Christ.

It is also important to note that the LDS scriptures indicate that “God’s wrath” is actually our self-judgment that we are not worthy to be in God’s presence. His arms of mercy are extended to us; it is up to us to choose whether we will walk into them. However, before we can stand to be in his presence, we must remove from our consciences the guilt that dwells within us. Atonement is about changing more than our minds; it is about changing our hearts. Our pain arises from our own choices to alienate ourselves and to build walls of isolation to protect our egos. If we persist in alienation, then we will be an isolated ego that has no contact or connection with anyone else. For all intents and purposes, it will be as if we are all alone in our own universe if we refuse to soften our hearts. The doors to our hearts lock on the inside, and we alone hold the key.

The key concept of the compassion theory of atonement is that the release of the energy of life effected through repentance is symbolized in blood sacrifice. The life of the sacrificial animal was considered to reside in the blood spilled when it was slain. The blood spilled during the sacrifice was sprinkled over the mercy-seat of the altar of sacrifice, thus covering it with the life given as a gift. The primary lexical meaning of “atonement” (<Hebrew script> —*kaphar*) in Hebrew is “to cover,” referring to the act of “covering” the mercy-seat or altar representing God’s holy presence with the blood of the sacrificial animal that represented the gift of its life given to God⁴ (Lev. 16:14–15). “To atone” meant to cover God’s holy presence represented by the mercy seat with a gift of life released in the death of the sacrificial animal—the life and God become one. In

LDS scripture, the life of the blood given in the sacrifice of animals is no longer acceptable because, with Christ's life having been given, the gift of life represented by the blood of the sacrificial animal is now actualized in the life of Christ given for us. This gift of his life to us is represented in the life-blood spilled in Gethsemane and on the cross. He has already given his gift. However, he now asks for our lives to be given back to him, represented by giving him our hearts. The sacrifices of the Mosaic law are done away; and in their place, Christ asks us to give to him the "sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (2 Ne. 2:7; 3 Ne. 9:20; 12:19; Eth. 4:15; Moro. 6:2). As the resurrected Christ explained to the Nephites:

And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings.

And ye shall offer as a sacrifice to me a broken heart and a contrite spirit. And whoso cometh unto me with a contrite spirit and a broken heart, him will I baptize with fire and the Holy Ghost. (3 Ne. 9:20)

There is a reason that the metaphor of a broken heart and contrite spirit is used. It refers to a real human action of breaking our hearts wide open and feeling contrition for all that we have done to injure others and our relationships with them. A "broken heart" is broken wide open to allow God to enter into the sacred intimacy of the most private part of our soul. In particular, we have injured our relationship with God by creating an ego-bound existence. However, the metaphor of the heart breaking open in sacrifice to God also expresses the truth that the "light" that resides in our hearts has been hidden and that we have held onto the pain of a guilty conscience and dis-eased body; this pain is released when we break our hearts open.

Another key concept of the compassion theory of atonement is that the painful energy of sin that we release through repentance causes real pain when Christ's receives it into his life through the union of his life with our life in us. The image of Christ's suffering seems to be that, when we enter into union with Christ, the "painful energy of sin" that resides in the flesh as a memory is transferred to him and he "processes" that pain through the light of his love. He feels the pain of the sins that we have committed because the life-energy that we share with him is painful.

In his atonement, Christ suffers for us, because of us, and with us. The sense of shared suffering expressed in the scriptures seems to entail that this type of pain is transferred to Christ when he accepts our life into his. However, only those who repent and thereby let go of the past escape suffering; otherwise, if we refuse to repent, we will suffer for our own sins. There is thus a dimension of repentance that consists of letting go of the past and “getting over it.” When we repent we release the energy of our painful existence that we have been holding onto—and this energy is transferred to Christ. However, LDS scriptures claim that this transfer is real and not merely metaphorical. He feels the pain of our sins that we release through repentance. Admittedly the scriptures don’t elucidate this concept of transferred psychosomatic pain. However, they do create ritual-images and word-pictures of the transfer of our pain to Christ in atonement. They speak repeatedly of sin being located and retained in the “flesh” or “carnal mind” (Rom. 7:18; 8:1–3; Gal. 4:17; 1 John 2:16; Mosiah 3:19, 16:3). The notion of transfer is well attested in the statements that Christ “bears our sins” or “takes upon him our iniquities.” The Day of Atonement also creates a ritual expression of the notion of transfer wherein the sins of the people are laid upon a goat that is driven out:

And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness.

And the goat shall bear upon him all the iniquities unto a land not inhabited, and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. (Lev. 16:21–22)

The compassion theory of atonement holds that Christ does not suffer as a substitute for us or as one who becomes guilty and receives deserved punishment in our place. So many concepts and claims in the assertion that “Christ bears our sins so that we don’t have to” require unpacking that it is difficult to express them at all. However, here I am interested in merely getting a handle on what the LDS scriptures claim and teach. I will return to do some unpacking shortly. For now it is important to note that the notion of transferring the pain for our sins is essential to the LDS claim of atonement. However, it seems to me that these LDS scriptures are not saying that, in the transfer of sins, Christ thereby becomes

actually guilty or culpable for our sins or has our guilt judicially imputed to him. What is transferred to him is not guilt or culpability but the pain for sin that we would otherwise suffer. The notion seems to be that, prior to the Atonement, the energy of life that has been damned up inside our closed hearts festers like pus; and when we open our hearts, we release this foul energy and transfer it to Christ. The energy of life that is trapped behind the walls of a closed heart becomes putrid like standing water because it is meant to flow freely between hearts. By opening our heart to Christ, it is purified. We invite him to dwell within us. As Alma says: "The Lord dwelleth not in unholy temples, but in the hearts of the righteous doth he dwell" (Alma 34:36). However, because of our alienated way of being behind the walls of a hardened hearts, we have refused God entrance into our hearts and we have not shared our lives, light, or love. When we repent, what we have been holding back and refused to give is shared in union with Christ. The transfer of pain for our sins occurs because of the union of life "in" each other. However, the "life energy" of our sins that we release is transferred to him, and it causes pain when Christ accepts it into his life.

In concrete terms, there are consequences for sinful conduct, or conduct which causes injury to our relationships. We cannot have the joy and happiness that come from living in intimate and loving relationships if we do not choose to be loving and if we do not refrain from conduct that injures our relationships. For example, I cannot have the joy of a loving and fulfilling relationship with my wife and children if I am not faithful, or if I am abusive or fail to be tender and loving. We cannot escape these consequences unless we change through repentance at the most fundamental level our way of being in the world. Repentance is a change of heart that results in a change of conduct and thus a change of consequences for our acts. When we let go of the anger, guilt, grudges, and pain by forgiving others and thereby receive forgiveness, we let go also of the pain that is caused by our sins—by our choices to be alienated, isolated, and alone. When we repent, the energy of pain that we hold onto is released; the walls that we build around our hearts to

protect them are broken down; the dams that we build to hold back our love burst; and the energy of love flows freely when it is released from our hearts like a beacon to be a light to the world. We no longer suffer because we have let go of the pain. When we let go, the energy of pain that has been dammed within our hearts is transferred to Christ, and he willingly accepts it as a necessary result of entering into loving union of life with us. Thus, we do not experience the pain of our sins if we repent; but we do if we don't repent. If we repent, then Christ experiences the pain of our sins. If we don't repent, then we suffer what he would suffer if we do repent.

A key concept of the compassion theory of the Atonement is that Christ's suffering is not a necessary condition of God's being able to forgive us; rather, Christ feels pain as a consequence of entering into union with us because such union entails feeling the pain of the energy of sin that we release when we repent. Now there are obviously issues here that require careful consideration and more than a bit of unpacking. I will address what I consider to be the most important of them in the next section. Here I want to simply point out that this view of the Atonement has at least one overriding virtue: It answers the most difficult question regarding atonement. Why can't God just forgive me without requiring Christ to suffer? After all, I have the power to forgive without requiring that someone else must suffer. Why can't God forgive us without requiring a pound of flesh—literally? The answer is that God can forgive us without requiring that Christ must innocently suffer as our substitute as the condition to propitiate his anger.⁵ However, the nature of loving forgiveness is such that, by entering into a renewed relationship with us, the pain caused by our sins is given to him. What is accomplished by divine forgiveness is not merely that our sins are no longer imputed to us but that our relationship is healed and reconciled. It is the very fact that Christ is divine—that he is immediately related to us so that our experience is his experience—that it is painful to enter into a relationship of indwelling union with us. Our alienation is healed in atonement by becoming at-one with each other and entering into the indwelling union of shared life. Thus, God cannot forgive us and enter into union with us without taking our lives into his and in so doing feel the pain that we have released through repentance.

The problem of atonement in conventional Christianity consists of the fact that it is a solution looking for a problem. Traditionally, theories of atonement answer the question about how we are forgiven of our sins by Christ's suffering as a substitute in our place, but there really does not seem to be a problem here because we can forgive others without a third party's enduring pain and suffering as a necessary condition. It seems that, in such a view, Christ's suffering is superfluous. It also seems that we have a power that God does not have—i.e., the power to forgive others without requiring a sacrifice or payment to appease (propitiate) our anger.

A part of the solution consists of the fact that the diagnosis of the problem is different in LDS theology. In the view of the Atonement presented in LDS scripture, the crucifixion of Christ is not administered by the Father who imposes suffering on his Son as a means of appeasing his wrath, or "propitiation" for sins. Nor is it a demand that is made by an abstract universal "law of justice" that someone must suffer for sin, so Christ must satisfy this demand because we cannot. Abstract universals simply don't make such personal demands. Rather, it is a means of making us free so that we can repent and return to him by healing our alienation. This is the doctrine of expiation. "Propitiation" and related cognates never appear in the Book of Mormon, but "expiation" and its cognates are frequent. Atonement is the means of removing the barriers between us that have kept us separated and alienated or "spiritually dead" because we are cut off from God's presence. Atonement is primarily about healing our alienation through reconciliation rather than satisfying the demands of some abstract universal justice.

Thus, Christ suffers in atonement, not so that he can satisfy the Father's demands or so that he can pay a debt that we owe to personified justice, as the LDS scriptures are often interpreted. Rather, Christ feels pain in atonement because it is painful to be in relationship with us. He feels pain because, in his love, he enters into us as the union of life that is in us; and we enter into him. In so doing, the pain of our sins is transferred to him. When we give ourselves to him in this relationship, our "life-energy" is transferred to him and he feels pain as the natural result of accepting our lives into his. In a sense, all of the dammed-up energy of life that we have kept hidden behind our walls of

ego-protection is released when he works in us and with us to soften our hearts to repent. We have hidden our light; and when we give up the outer facade that we think protects us from pain, we can let our light out from behind the facade to shine. In this release and letting go, we transfer our life's energy and light to Christ to be healed. When we see that he is willing to enter into relationship with us despite the fact that doing so causes him great pain, we are softened and enabled to let go of our sins and give them to him to be healed. As Paul Fiddes stated:

In this past event the God who was and is always willing to forgive gains through the cross the experience of the human heart that gives a new way into our hearts. A change in God (in the sense of new experience) thus makes a change in us. We experience God as one who empathizes with us, and so we are enabled to face up both to judgment and to acceptance. The conditioning of God by the world creates a new condition for human response, and opens up the future.⁶

I also want to address briefly an objection to this view of atonement because it discloses an important dimension of Christ's atonement in LDS thought. How does my repentance and consequent release of my pain in the here-and-now cause pain to Christ in Gethsemane in the past? Is such backward causation possible? No. Backward causation is not implied in this view because atonement is not a matter of Christ simply experiencing all of our pains for all temporal times merely during the temporal interval of time when he is in Gethsemane, for his atonement is not merely something that occurs in a single moment. There is no backward causation because atonement is more than a one-time event that occurred in Gethsemane and the path to the cross. Rather, atonement becomes God's very way of being in the world. Atonement—to be united as one with us—is therefore the way that Christ seeks to relate to us at all times and in all places. Atonement is God's way of being with us. Atonement defines the way that God loves us. Atonement is the way that divine persons relate to one another. In fact, atonement is the basis of divine life and partaking of the divine nature, for in the union of life and light arising from the oneness shared with God through Christ, we grow in the light and share in all that he has and is. We grow in knowledge and power by being glorified in shared glory, and thus we glorify each other. He is glorified in us and we are glorified in Him. Thus, atonement is the basis for deification in LDS thought.

Another key concept of the compassion theory of atonement is

that atonement is God's way of being in relationship with the world and therefore is not limited to Christ's suffering in Gethsemane and the cross. In LDS thought, the Atonement cannot be localized merely in Gethsemane, for the Atonement also comprises the resurrection. According to the Book of Mormon, we are made free to act for ourselves by atonement. In Doctrine & Covenants 88 and 93 we are made free by the light that is given to every person. It appears that the Atonement which makes us free to act for ourselves is not limited to a single event or series of events in the passion, crucifixion, and resurrection but is, in fact, the way that God always relates to us in every moment. In this sense, the Atonement is God's act of granting his light to us as a sheer gift in every moment.

The LDS scriptures don't focus solely on Gethsemane and the cross. None of the LDS scriptures state that God suffers only in Gethsemane. Christ's entire life is a life of reconciliation and love. Look again at the statements by Abinadi and Alma regarding Christ's suffering. Christ suffers not merely in his death (Mosiah 15:7) but also "suffereth temptation . . . [and] suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people" (Mosiah 15:5). He suffers because we choose to be alienated from him. He suffers because he has taken upon himself flesh and is moved with mercy and compassion for us because he now knows what it is to suffer in the flesh as Alma 7:11–13 states: "And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind." He suffers because we are wicked and refuse to enter into a healing relationship with him. Our refusal to enter into relationship with him causes him pain because he loves us and seeks our best interests. The Book of Mormon focuses on Christ's entire mortal life as redemptive suffering and healing our alienation through his suffering love. As Nephi stated:

"And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, and he suffereth it; and they smite him, and he suffereth it. Yea, they spit upon him, and he suffereth it, because of his loving kindness and his longsuffering towards the children of men" (1 Ne. 19:9).

If atonement occurs both before Christ's birth and after his death and therefore is not limited to the series of events culminating in Christ's death, then why do the scriptures focus on the pain of the Atonement in the garden of Gethsemane and the path to the cross? The most obvious reason for such a focus is that we see the

Atonement in the garden of Gethsemane and the path to the cross? The most obvious reason for such a focus is that we see the temporal instance of atonement in its fulness manifested in Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. The pain that Christ suffered as a mortal is precisely the pain that is the most poignant experience of atonement – though it is only one experience of atoning pain among others that Christ experienced. As Amulek's discourse in Alma and Abinadi's defense in Mosiah 15 indicate, it is the God who has become man to suffer as a mortal that effects the Atonement. It is because God has become mortal that the union of mortal pain with divine compassion is made possible. Because he suffers as a mortal, his bowels are moved with compassion toward us. It is precisely Jesus's suffering in Gethsemane on the road to Calvary that culminates in his death on a Roman cross that is the preeminent manifestation for all atonement. In Gethsemane, the fulness of glory that Christ enjoyed with the Father in the premortal life filled him again after he had kenotically emptied himself of a fulness of divine glory.

The high-priestly prayer of John 17 makes at least the following claims: (1) Before the world, Christ enjoyed a fulness of glory with the Father (John 17:5); (2) As a mortal, Christ did not possess a fulness of the divine glory and thus he asks the Father to restore it to him (John 17:4–5); (3) The purpose of such glory is that his disciples might be one in him as he is one in the Father (John 17:11, 21); and (4) Christ had received a fulness of divine glory again during his great intercessory prayer (John 17:21–23). This prayer is thus a model of atonement and its explanation. Christ was renewed in a fulness of divine glory in the Father while in Gethsemane. At the same time, he suffered excruciating agony by being united as one with the world.

In this moment of joining the pain of the flesh and mortal existence with the divine knowledge that includes experience of every human experience, Christ became aware of the fulness of human pain that is caused by sin and the magnitude of divine love to forgive sin and heal our alienation. His compassion and love are completed and culminate on the cross where he willingly gave his life—a life that is given to be in us as one—so that the energy of sin that entered him in Gethsemane died with his mortal body. That is how I read these scriptures. As Paul Fiddes observed:

To speak of [Christ's own journey of forgiveness through life and death] as "new experience" in God's triune life does not deny that God has always been offering forgiveness to created persons. If the divine nature is love, then throughout human history God has been sharing in the darkness of human experience, and through continuous participation has been creating change in human hearts and human society. God is always moving on the journey of forgiveness and so absorbing painful new experience; the Hebrew Bible, with its story of the God who goes into slavery and exile with his people, tells us no less. But the Christian story is that is that the cross of Jesus was the deepest point of descent for God into the alienation of human life, that nowhere else has God journeyed as far into the despair and nihilism of his creation. At the cross was a new situation for the forgiving God; there was a unique experience of human hostility—expressed towards Christ—and a unique human response—expressed by Christ. Thus here, to a degree which has happened nowhere else, God is drawn into human flesh and stands where humankind stands.²

Thus, the purpose of the Atonement is to make it possible for us to freely choose to return to God's loving embrace by reciprocating his love with our own freely chosen love. We are empowered to love him because he loved us first—and his love is manifest in his willingness to forgive us and accept us into his life even though it causes him pain. Christ's atonement delivers us from captivity to the devil and sin by making us free to choose. We are enabled to choose by letting go of the pains and hurts that have remained in our lives and that have shackled us to our past. We are freed to choose because, by offering a relationship to us as a matter of sheer grace—accepting us just as we are—we are freed from the need to justify ourselves. God's gift of universal love and acceptance frees us from the need to engage in self-deception to protect our tender egos—and in so doing allows us to escape the mirage of our egos and see ourselves for what and who we really are: his sons and daughters. We are also empowered to choose a relationship that we could not otherwise choose unless it were offered to us freely. We are empowered by his willingness to enter into our hearts and become the energy of light and life that renews our lives with his life. We are enabled to repent by his universal love because we can let go of the past hurts, pains, and patterns of conduct to trust him through having faith in him.

When we accept God's love through faith in Christ, we are justified. That is, we enter into a relationship where His light and divine love enter our hearts. At this moment, a process of sanctification commences and we begin to grow in the light. In receiving Christ's life and light we live a shared life, a divine life. The light transforms us to be conformed to his image and likeness

in a process of Christification. At the commencement of shared life, he experiences the pain of our sinful lives by uniting our life with ours. As we grow toward completion we experience joy in shared life. We live our lives in one another at-one-ment.

A final key concept of the compassion theory of atonement is thus that Christ became what we are so that we might become what he is. By becoming mortal so that he could know how to succor us, Christ has opened the way for us to be what he is by sharing the complete unity and oneness that he shares with the Father. Christ's purpose in becoming mortal is to open the way for us to become his peer. The properties of divinity arise from a relationship of shared unity and life that glorifies each other. We have been invited into this relationship. By entering into relationship with Christ through faith on his name and by enduring in the path of shared life, we grow in the light of his life until we share fully in his divine attributes and are made partakers of his divine nature. That divine nature is precisely the shared unity of life and light of love that glorifies those in the shared relationship to progress from one glory to another together. By sharing as one his life and glory, we grow in the light that he offers to us until we know as he knows and are empowered to do as he does.