

Given on August 22nd, 2010

Atonement

The simplest definition for the word atonement is, “Amends or reparation made for an injury or wrong; expiation.” Expiation means to make amends, to apologize. In another context, the atonement means, “Reconciliation or an instance of reconciliation between God and humans.” I would like to change that definition slightly, and say Reconciliation or an instance of reconciliation between God and His children.

When our Heavenly Father created us, He knew we would be imperfect beings. He knew that we would sin, but He still loved us and wanted to be with us. He provided a way that we could be together again, and that is through Jesus Christ. I would like to focus a portion of my talk today on this scripture, 2 Nephi 25:23 it teaches,

“For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.”

The first part I wish to speak of is, “To believe in Christ.” Now, does believing in Christ just mean that we think He is real? That we believe His atonement is real? That we believe He is the Son of God? What does that mean? The word, belief itself means, “The mental act, condition, or habit of placing trust or confidence in another.” If we are going to put confidence in another, in this case our Savior...we are recognizing Him for what He claims to be...that He is the only Begotten of the Father.

“That He came into the world to do the will of His Father, because His Father sent Him.” He continues, “And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil –

“And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works.” (3 Nephi 27:13-15).

Now if you believe in Jesus Christ, if you believe in His atonement, if you believe that He can save you then the next part of 2 Nephi 25:23 is, “and to be reconciled of God.”

It is interesting, in this scripture it sounds like it is our choice whether or not we will be reconciled of God. In one dictionary, listen to the different definitions of reconcile, and while I am reading them, think of them in the context of our Savior, Jesus Christ and His atonement.

“1. To reestablish a close relationship between.”

“2. To settle or resolve.”

“3. To bring (oneself) to accept: For example, He finally reconciled himself to change.”

“4. To make compatible or consistent: For example, reconcile my way of thinking with yours.”

That is from one dictionary. So, in the context of our Savior Jesus Christ; the first is to reestablish a close relationship between...He is always there for us, so it is up to us if we want Him in our lives, if we want His love and guidance. The next is to settle or resolve. Jacob 4:11 reads,

“Wherefore, beloved brethren, be reconciled unto him through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son, and ye may obtain a resurrection, according to the power of the resurrection which is in Christ, and be presented as the first-fruits of Christ unto God, having faith, and obtained a good hope of glory in him before he manifesteth himself in the flesh.”

To settle or resolve is speaking of our lives. We need to come unto Him in the waters of baptism. We need to constantly be repenting of our mistakes and our rebellious actions; we need to internally resolve to serve Him. The next definition was to bring oneself to accept...to reconcile yourself to change. We need to realize our relationship with God. He is not a distant being who created just the mountains. He is our loving Father who will be with us always if we just let Him. David A. Bednar taught,

“As soon as we learn the true relationship in which we stand toward God (namely, God is our Father, and we are his children), then at once prayer becomes natural and instinctive on our part.” We need acknowledge our need for God in our lives, and come unto Him using the atonement of Christ every step of the way.

The next definition of reconcile is, “To make compatible or consistent: For example, reconcile my way of thinking with yours.” This is so interesting; using the atonement of Jesus Christ in our lives to enable us to become more like Him. Thoughts turn to actions, actions turn to habits, and habits show our true character. With the atonement of Jesus Christ working miracles in our lives we can steadily grow closer and closer to God, and steadily become more and more like God Himself. It is our choice what we do...it always has been.

Before this life, “You developed your identity and increased your spiritual capabilities. Blessed with the gift of agency, you made important decisions, such as the decision to follow Heavenly Father’s plan. These decisions affected your life then and now. You grew in intelligence and learned to love the truth, and you prepared to come to the earth, where you could continue to progress” (True to the Faith, 116).

It is our choice to serve God, to try to become like Him, and to utilize the atonement of Jesus Christ. The next part of 2 Nephi 25:23 reads, “for we know that it is by grace that we are saved...” Grace is a complex word with a lot of weight under it. We are fortunate enough to learn about grace through the Bible Dictionary, it reads,

“A word that occurs frequently in the New Testament, especially in the writings of Paul. The main idea of the word is divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ.

It is through the grace of the Lord Jesus, made possible by his atoning sacrifice, that mankind will be

raised in immortality, every person receiving his body from the grave in a condition of everlasting life. It is likewise through the grace of the Lord that individuals, through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, receive strength and assistance to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. This grace is an enabling power that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation after they have expended their own best efforts.”

The last part of 2 Nephi 25:23 says, “After all we can do.” To have the miracles of the atonement in our life, we have to give it our all. We have to try our absolute hardest...then, after that He will help us. Elder Boyd K. Packer said the following:

“There is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. This is the promise of the atonement of Christ.”

An apostle of the Lord, says that there is absolutely nothing that the atonement of Christ does not act in. This reminds me of Alma the younger, in Alma 36 after the angel had spoken to him, Alma said the following,

“I was struck with such great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed, that I fell to the earth and I did hear no more.

But I was 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; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments.

Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.

Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.

And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul. And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world.

Now as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death.

And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more.

And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain.

Yea I say unto you, my son, that there could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. Yea, and again I say unto you, my son, that on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy" (Alma 36:11-21).

That is a powerful story. I wish I had time to teach the beginning of it in depth. Alma the younger had gone about destroying the church, committing the most atrocious of sins...and like Boyd K. Packer said...there is no limit to the atonement of Jesus Christ. In this story, first Alma the younger was humbled, and he was punished. He was harrowed up by the pains of hell. Does anyone know what a harrow is? A harrow is a tool used in farming, it consists of a heavy metal frame with sharp teeth or upright discs that is used to break up the ground. He felt that through the pains of hell...and then he remembered what his father had taught. His father had taught about the very Son of God, satisfying the demands of justice, and atoning for all who would accept Him as the Son of God, and their Savior. When Alma remembered this, and caught hold on this thought, and asked as sincerely as is humanly possible, he could feel the pain no more.

The wonderful thing about the atonement is that not only did it take away Alma's pain, but it also brought more joy to Him than he had ever felt. The atonement when used in our lives will do the exact same thing as it did for Alma. It will abolish our guilt, it will cleanse us of sin, and it will bring us closer to God, and make us happier and happier as we use it. Each week when we partake of the Sacrament, we have the opportunity to utilize Christ's atonement. It is our choice, however. Even if we take the Sacrament...if we do it while thinking about last night's football game, or what shoes I will wear tomorrow, if we take the Sacrament without humble prayer, without asking sincerely for forgiveness, for this act to cleanse us of the wrongs committed since the last time we had renewed our covenants with God...if we partake of the Sacrament nonchalantly then it will do nothing for us.

The Sacrament prayer on the bread says the following,

"O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it; that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen" (Moroni 4:3).

The effect of action on our part is to have the Spirit with us always. To have the Spirit always means that we are worthy; it means that we have used the atonement. In this scripture, it tells us how to use the atonement. We must partake of the Sacrament...remembering the body and blood of Jesus Christ, witness unto our Eternal Father that we are will to take upon us the name of Jesus Christ himself. This means that we try our hardest to be like Him, to do what He would do if He were here. The prayer continues saying we always remember Him. This does not mean that while we are trying to do a math problem in school we have to have the scriptures out that say all knowledge will be given to us through the spirit of Christ. To always remember Him means that we constantly keep ourselves in check, we are

constantly evaluating ourselves and our actions to see if they are in accordance with the will of God. We do remember Him in all things, as we go throughout our days...thinking of what we can be doing better, how we can serve our brothers and sisters in this life, how we can bring them unto Christ. And finally...keeping ourselves worthy of the blessings of heaven at all times, in all things, and in all places. This is just my opinion on what it means to remember Him always.

Then the scripture continues, we need to keep the commandments. I think that basically what this scripture is saying...if we truly love Jesus Christ, and our Heavenly Father, then we will have the Spirit with us always. If we did truly love them, then all of this would be natural and instinctive. Just like what Elder Bednar said about prayer...once we understand our relationship to God as His children, then prayer will become natural and instinctive on our part. I believe that if we truly love God, and know God, then we will perfectly understand what it means to always remember him. We will understand that we need to keep the commandments simply out of love, not obligation or guilt...but out of love. John 14, Jesus Christ says,

“If ye love me, keep my commandments.

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever...”

Then in 23,

“Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ love us so much that they are willing to let us choose for ourselves. They are willing to put us through the trials and pains of life, Jesus Christ suffered for us, knowing that we would go through difficult times...simply so we can grow closer to Him. They want to help us, they want us to find them, and they want us to know of them, and to love them.

The scriptures tell us in many accounts from Matthew 7, to 3 Nephi 14, to Doctrine and Covenants 4, “Ask, and ye shall receive; knock and it shall be opened unto you. Amen.”

Now in regular literature today, or in any persuasive arguments, or any magazine ad...anything, it is common sense that if something is repeated, especially more than once...then the campaigner really wants to get that point across. In the scriptures, it says those exact words, “Ask, and ye shall receive; knock and it shall be opened unto you.” At least 13 times. Not only are they trying to get the point across, but the prophets that wrote these Holy volumes of scripture are telling us that it is true. So many different prophets...testifying of the exact same thing, “Ask and ye shall receive; knock and it shall be opened unto you.”

If you are struggling in life, can't seem to find your testimony with everything Satan is throwing at you, if you simply have just given up...then search your heart, and ask for help. Ask for whatever you believe you stand in need of. Do you need more faith, do you need strength to overcome trials.

I am telling you...the atonement has been performed for you personally; you just have to embrace it and let it be the lifeblood throughout the rest of your life. We all need to have faith in Jesus Christ's ability to help us. We need to believe in Him as our Savior, and dive head first into this Gospel...and live it as children of God.

Several years ago, I felt somewhat like Alma the younger. At that point I didn't think of it as being racked and harrowed up with the pains of hell, but I know that I hated everything about life, I hated myself and what I was doing. I even hated the Gospel, because a part of me knew it was true...and knew it was condemning me. This pain and anguish went on for several years, to the point where I was contemplating suicide. It got to the point where just about every day I would break down crying...because I had given up. I didn't think there was any hope. I didn't believe in the promise found in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that says the Lord will make a way to escape the temptation. So suicide was my only choice left, simply because I wanted to be away from this earth and the pains that were so prominent in my life. I thought it would help because it would get me away from what I had been struggling so severely with. Something kept keeping me here though. Finally something happened...something big. And I didn't feel like my Heavenly Father was a distant God judging me for my weaknesses any more, I felt like He was a loving Heavenly Father who wanted nothing more to help me.

I prayed more sincerely than I ever had before, telling Him that I needed Him more than anything, and I knew it. The more I prayed and read my scriptures...I could see more change in my life. It was like the sun was finally coming out after a storm that had blackened my life for years. I could start to see hope as I could feel the atonement working such apparent miracles in my life. I started to really grow, and to love the Gospel, and to strengthen my testimony that was so deeply rooted inside of me. I soon became worthy to bear the Priesthood which I had held for several years, I became worthy to go into the temple, I became worthy to partake of the Sacrament, and partake of the blessings of Heaven. I was on the path of Eternal Life. The Lord saw fit to help me, when I needed His help the most. Since then, I have had my ups and downs, but am steadily growing more like Christ.

It is interesting because this in this story I was so prideful and so faithless that the Lord couldn't do anything to help me, because I have agency. But when I let Him into my life...when I was about to give up everything...He helped me immediately. Our God is a fourth watch God. This time that I spent in pain, helped me realize how wonderful life really is. Like Alma, nothing had been more excruciating than my pain, and nothing has been so amazing than my joy. In this time I learned many lessons that have proved to be directly applicable to the majority of challenges in my life. My Heavenly Father knew what was going to come of this, He knew that eventually I would come to Him...but there were things I needed to learn first. My Heavenly Father didn't enjoy my pain, and Jesus Christ certainly didn't enjoy suffering for my stupid actions...but they both had hope for me, and that is why they bore my pains with me...because they love me, and they want me to be with them.

Bruce R. McConkie taught that the atonement of Jesus Christ is the most basic and fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, but we know the least about it. I think that it is interesting, because it requires faith to believe in the effects of the atonement. Without the atonement...nothing would matter. Without the atonement we would not be able to overcome death, we would never have

the fullness of joy...becoming like our Father in Heaven and receiving Exaltation. Without the atonement we could never know happiness. But still, we know very little about it. We know, "As Adam brought death, so Christ brought life; as Adam is the father of mortality, so Christ is the father of immortality.

And without both, mortality and immortality, man cannot work out his salvation and ascend to those heights beyond the skies where gods and angels dwell forever in eternal glory." Bruce R. McConkie. James E. Talmage taught,

"The atonement was plainly to be a vicarious sacrifice, voluntary and love-inspired on the Savior's part, universal in its application to mankind so far as men shall accept the means of deliverance thus placed within their reach. For such a mission only one who was without sin could be eligible...Jesus Christ was the only Being suited to the requirements of the great sacrifice:

- 1 – As the one and only sinless Man;
- 2 – As the Only Begotten of the Father and therefore the only Being born to earth possessing in their fulness the attributes of both Godhood and manhood;
- 3 – As the One who had been chosen in the heavens and foreordained to this service.

What other man has been without sin, and therefore wholly exempt from the dominion of Satan, and to whom death, the wage of sin, is not naturally due? Had Jesus Christ met death as other men have done – the result of the power that Satan has gained over them through their sins – His death would have been but an individual experience, expiatory in no degree of any faults or offenses but His own. Christ's absolute sinlessness made Him eligible, His humility and willingness rendered Him acceptable to the Father, as the atoning sacrifice whereby propitiation could be made for the sins of all men.

What other man has lived with power to withstand death, over whom death could not prevail except through his own submission? Yet Jesus Christ could not be slain until His 'hour had come,' and that, the hour in which He voluntarily surrendered His life, and permitted His own decease through an act of will. Born of a mortal mother He inherited the capacity to die; begotten by an immortal Sire He possessed as a heritage the power to withstand death indefinitely. He literally gave up His life; to this effect is His own affirmation: 'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.' And further: 'For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in Himself.' Only such a One could conquer death; in none but Jesus Christ was realized this requisite condition of a Redeemer of the world."

Now, in our lives today, how can who apply this? How can we have the sufficient faith to simply believe in the atonement and its infinite power? I have several scriptures to share, to assist in teaching how we can perfectly know.

The first is James 1:5, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed."

So...if we lack wisdom, ask God for knowledge...with faith. There is that action word again: faith. How do you have faith? In this context ask yourself, "Do I believe in God, or do I believe that we evolved from monkeys and there was no Supreme Being who created everything?" Do you believe that He, the one who created all, is able to give you knowledge regarding anything you prayerfully and humbly seek? Do you believe that He loves you and wants to help you? Do you believe that the scriptures were written by prophets who were very in tune with the Spirit, and the scriptures are the words of God himself?

If ye lack wisdom...ask for help. If you don't have faith, and you wish you had more...ask for help? 3 Nephi 14:7-8 says, "Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened."

Sincerely get down on your knees and just ask for help, ask for guidance, and you will receive it. When you do this, whatever answer you receive...do not stop there. The first step to growth...is knowledge, the second step is action. If you are standing there and you move your right foot forward...you still haven't moved, until you lift your left foot and move in front. Action is required. If you receive an answer to any prayer that you aren't expecting and you don't know what to do, think about this scripture,

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Jesus Christ teaches us in Isaiah, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

For s the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

The scriptures are here for our learning and our benefit. There are countless stories that directly relate to our lives and how we can grow closer to our Savior. Is it really so hard to study the scriptures each day? I am not talking about reading 5 verses after your 14 hour day while you are laying in bed with your eyes half closed and 90% of your regular consciousness is completely non-existent. Seriously think about this, in our lives...a lot of the time the scriptures are not put in first. Some spend more time on facebook, some spend more time watching tv, sports, or movies. Some spend more time putting on their makeup; some spend even more time in the shower. My point is...why do we underestimate the Divine power of the scriptures and the impact they have in our lives. Our lives are like pizza. The scriptures...are the very dough of the pizza. Everything else...like makeup, showers, movies, facebook, sports, work...whatever it is...those are like the pepperoni, the green peppers, all of the things that come after the dough. Without the dough...your pizza will be falling apart. Without a steady and constant input of Divine knowledge and the Spirit put into your life...it will fall apart. The scriptures, the Ensign,

General Conference talks, prayer...where we pray seeking personal revelation...these things are absolutely imperative for growth.

I learned a valuable lesson just recently. I will tell you a brief story.

So, for some time now I have been praying to be able to love my scriptures. Each morning I would wake up...read a chapter and call it good. I rarely thought twice about what I had read and I was just kind of putting along. But I really didn't enjoy reading my scriptures. I loved my scriptures, I taught people with them, they would strengthen me when I needed it...but I didn't really dive in and search the scriptures daily like I should. Then, just recently I started a new way of studying. Each day before this way of studying I would pray for an abundance of His Spirit, I would pray for His love, and for help as I tried to grow through the scriptures. This new way of studying enabled me to completely immerse myself in not only the scriptures, but general conference talks, wonderful church literature, so many things...and I did this every day. After about a week...I realized that I had done twice the amount of studying as I had previously anticipated...and I wanted more.

Finally, I had started loving the scriptures. It wasn't out of obligation or selfish reasons that I read a chapter each morning or a chapter each night. But I actually loved them and wanted to be in them. As I continue this each day, my love for them grows stronger and stronger. Likewise, I can feel my faith in my Savior strengthening, my ability to resist temptation, strengthening, and the love I feel for everyone...strengthening.

This is all because I humbly prayed for help and guidance. But that wasn't all; when I had prayed so many times before for this, nothing ever happened. It only happened when I prayed humbly for help ...and did all I could to have Him answer my prayer.

In our lives, we need to help our Heavenly Father answer our prayers. It is like saying, I want to be astronaut. But you drop out of school your sophomore year and you don't care. You still keep wishing you were an astronaut; you keep even keep praying that you become an astronaut. But instead you are just going through everyday sitting at a computer at a minimum wage job, and then you go home and eat food while watching tv. He isn't going to just send a space shuttle to your back yard and say hop on. If you really want to be an astronaut....it will take effort on your part.

It is like asking for missionary experiences, but when you have the feeling to open your mouth you don't do it. HE LOVES US AND WANTS TO HELP US!!! We just have to open the door, we just have to have faith, and work for it.

The atonement of Jesus Christ is in place, and He wants us to use it. It can be difficult at times, and sometimes it may seem utterly impossible to change and become better. But I testify that the atonement of Jesus Christ works miracles in my life every time I let it. It has such unfathomable power that is incomparable to anything else in existence. We cannot understand it, but we can have faith and knowledge of its power. We also must have faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ Himself. He said, "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" (Matthew 11:28-30).

This is talking about the atonement. Don't suffer when you don't have to, just ask Him for help, for forgiveness, for His Spirit to cleanse you. You will come to know that the atonement is very real, and it will change your life.

I testify with Bruce R. McConkie when he says,

"In a coming day I will feel the nail marks in his hands and in his feet and shall wet his feet with my tears. But I shall not know any better then than I know now that He is God's almighty Son, that he is our Savior and Redeemer, and that salvation comes in and through His atoning blood and in no other way. God grant that all of us may walk in the light as God our Father is in the light so that, according to the promises, the blood of Jesus Christ his Son will cleanse us from all sin."

These things have been made known unto me by the power of the Holy Ghost which the Lord has so willingly and trustingly bestowed upon me. I am forever grateful for His atoning sacrifice, and I say these things in His sacred name, even Jesus Christ. Amen.