

# The Enabling Power of the Atonement

## ***Atonement Enables Us to Both Overcome and Become***

**David A. Bednar** (Quorum of the Twelve Apostles)

The gospel of Jesus Christ encompasses much more than avoiding, overcoming, and being cleansed from sin and the bad influences in our lives; it also essentially entails doing good, being good, and becoming better. Repenting of our sins and seeking forgiveness are spiritually necessary, and we must always do so. But remission of sin is not the only or even the ultimate purpose of the gospel. To have our hearts changed by the Holy Spirit such that "we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2), as did King Benjamin's people, is the covenant responsibility we have accepted. This mighty change is not simply the result of working harder or developing greater individual discipline. Rather, it is the consequence of a fundamental change in our desires, our motives, and our natures made possible through the Atonement of Christ the Lord. Our spiritual purpose is to overcome both sin and the desire to sin, both the taint and the tyranny of sin.

Prophets throughout the ages have emphasized the dual requirements of (1) avoiding and overcoming bad and (2) doing good and becoming better. Consider the penetrating questions posed by the Psalmist:

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?

"He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully" (Psalm 24:3-4).

Brothers and sisters, it is possible for us to have clean hands but not have a pure heart. Please notice that both clean hands and a pure heart are required to ascend into the hill of the Lord and to stand in His holy place.

Let me suggest that hands are made clean through the process of putting off the natural man and by overcoming sin and the evil influences in our lives through the Savior's Atonement. Hearts are purified as we receive His strengthening power to do good and become better. All of our worthy

desires and good works, as necessary as they are, can never produce clean hands and a pure heart. It is the Atonement of Jesus Christ that provides both a cleansing and redeeming power that helps us to overcome sin and a sanctifying and strengthening power that helps us to become better than we ever could by relying only upon our own strength. The infinite Atonement is for both the sinner and for the saint in each of us.

In the Book of Mormon, we find the masterful teachings of King Benjamin concerning the mission and Atonement of Jesus Christ. The simple doctrine he taught caused the congregation to fall to the earth, for the fear of the Lord had come upon them.

"And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men" (Mosiah 4:2; emphasis added).

Again in this verse we find the twofold blessing of both forgiveness of sin, suggesting clean hands, and the transformation of our nature, signifying pure hearts.

As King Benjamin concluded his instruction, he reiterated the importance of these two basic aspects of spiritual development.

"And now, for the sake of these things which I have spoken unto you-that is, for the sake of *retaining a remission of your sins from day to day, that ye may walk guiltless before God* - I would that ye should impart of your substance to the poor" (Mosiah 4:26; emphasis added).

Our sincere desire should be to have both clean hands *and* a pure heart-both a remission of sins from day to day and to walk guiltless before God. Clean hands alone will not be enough when we stand before Him who is pure and who, as "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19), freely spilled His precious blood for us.

Some who hear or read this message may think the spiritual progress I am describing is not

attainable in their lives. We may believe these truths apply to others but not to us.

We will not attain a state of perfection in this life, but we can and should press forward with faith in Christ along the strait and narrow path and make steady progress toward our eternal destiny. The Lord's pattern for spiritual development is "line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little" (2 Nephi 28:30). Small, steady, incremental spiritual improvements are the steps the Lord would have us take. Preparing to walk guiltless before God is one of the primary purposes of mortality and the pursuit of a lifetime; it does not result from sporadic spurts of intense spiritual activity.

I witness that the Savior will strengthen and assist us to make sustained, paced progress. The example in the Book of Mormon of "many, exceedingly great many" (Alma 13:12) in the ancient Church who were pure and spotless before God is a source of encouragement and comfort to me. I suspect those members of the ancient Church were ordinary men and women just like you and me. These individuals could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence, and they "were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God" (v. 12). And these principles and this process of spiritual progress apply to each of us equally and always. ("Clean Hands and a Pure Heart," *Ensign*, Nov 2007, pp. 80–83; underlining added)

### ***Atonement Enables Us to Change Our Lives***

**Ezra Taft Benson** (1899-1994) President

The next principle I would like to discuss is this: *No one is more anxious to see us change our lives than the Father and the Savior.* In the book of Revelation is a powerful and profound invitation from the Savior. He says, "I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him." (Rev. 3:20.) Note that He does not say, "I stand at the door and wait for you to knock." He is calling, beckoning, asking that we simply open our hearts and let Him in.

In Moroni's great sermon on faith, the principle is even more clearly taught. He was told by the Lord,

"If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men."

It matters not what is our lack or our weakness or our insufficiency. His gifts and powers are sufficient to overcome them all.

Moroni continues with the words of the Lord:

"My grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, *then will I make weak things become strong unto them.*" (Ether 12:27; italics added.)

What a promise from the Lord! The very source of our troubles can be changed, molded, and formed into a strength and a source of power. This promise is repeated in one form or another in many other scriptures. Isaiah said,

"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." (Isa. 40:29.)

Paul was told by the Lord,

"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9.)

In the Doctrine and Covenants we read,

"He that trembleth under my power shall be made strong, and shall bring forth fruits of praise and wisdom." (D&C 52:17; see also 1 Ne. 17:3; 2 Ne. 3:13; D&C 1:28; 133:58–59.)

Brothers and sisters, we must take our sins to the Lord in humble and sorrowful repentance. We must plead with Him for power to overcome them. The promises are sure. He will come to our aid. We will find the power to change our lives. ("A Mighty Change of Heart," *Ensign*, Oct. 1989, pp. 4-5; emphasis added)

**Dallin H. Oaks** (Quorum of the Twelve Apostles)

The healing power of the Lord Jesus Christ—whether it removes our burdens or strengthens us to endure and live with them like the Apostle Paul—is available for every affliction in mortality.

After I gave a general conference talk on the evils of pornography (see "Pornography," *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2005, 87–90), I received many letters from persons burdened with this addiction. Some of these letters were from men who had overcome pornography. One man wrote:

"There are several lessons I've gleaned from my experience coming out of the darkness of a sin that so thoroughly dominates the lives of the people it ensnares: (1) This is a major problem that is unbelievably difficult to overcome. ... (2) The most

important source of support and strength in the repentance process is the Savior. ... (3) Intense, daily scripture study, regular temple worship, and serious, contemplative participation in the ordinance of the sacrament are all indispensable parts of a true repentance process. This, I assume, is because all of these activities serve to deepen and strengthen one's relationship with the Savior, one's understanding of His atoning sacrifice, and one's faith in His healing power" (letter dated Oct. 24, 2005).

"Come unto me," the Savior said, "and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29). That heavy-laden man turned to the Savior, and so can each of us.

A woman whose marriage was threatened by her husband's addiction to pornography wrote how she stood beside him for five pain-filled years until, as she said,

"through the gift of our precious Savior's glorious Atonement and what He taught me about forgiveness, [my husband] finally is free—and so am I."

As one who needed no cleansing from sin, but only sought a loved one's deliverance from captivity, she wrote this advice:

"Commune with the Lord. ... He is your best friend! He knows your pain because He has felt it for you already. He is ready to carry that burden. Trust Him enough to place it at His feet and allow Him to carry it for you. Then you can have your anguish replaced with His peace, in the very depths of your soul" (letter dated Apr. 18, 2005).

A man wrote a General Authority about how the power of the Atonement helped him with his problem of same-gender attraction. He had been excommunicated for serious transgressions that violated his temple covenants and his responsibilities to his children. He had to choose whether to attempt to live the gospel or whether to continue a course contrary to its teachings.

"I knew it would be difficult," he wrote, "but I didn't realize what I would have to go through." His letter describes the emptiness and loneliness and the incredible pain he experienced from deep within his soul as he sought to return. He prayed mightily for forgiveness, sometimes for hours at a time. He was sustained by reading the scriptures, by the companionship of a loving bishop, and by priesthood blessings. But what finally made the difference was the help of the Savior. He explained:

"It [was] only through Him and His Atonement. ... I now feel an overwhelming gratitude. My pains have been almost more than I could bear at times, and yet they were so small compared to what He suffered. Where there once was darkness in my life, there is now love and gratitude."

He continues:

"Some profess that change is possible and therapy is the only answer. They are very learned on the subject and have so much to offer those who struggle ... , but I worry that they forget to involve Heavenly Father in the process. If change is to happen, it will happen according to the will of God. I also worry that many people focus on the causes of [same-gender attraction]. ... There is no need to determine why I have [this challenge]. I don't know if I was born with it, or if environmental factors contributed to it. The fact of the matter is that I have this struggle in my life and what I do with it from this point forward is what matters" (letter dated Mar. 25, 2006).

The persons who wrote these letters know that the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the healing it offers do much more than provide the opportunity for repentance from sins. The Atonement also gives us the strength to endure "pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind," because our Savior also took upon Him "the pains and the sicknesses of his people" (Alma 7:11). Brothers and sisters, if your faith and prayers and the power of the priesthood do not heal you from an affliction, the power of the Atonement will surely give you the strength to bear the burden.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," the Savior said, "and I will give you rest ... unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28–29).

As we struggle with the challenges of mortality, I pray for each of us, as the prophet Mormon prayed for his son, Moroni:

"May Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death, ... and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever" (Moroni 9:25).

I testify of Jesus Christ, our Savior, who invites us all to come unto Him and be perfected in Him. He will bind up our wounds and He will heal the heavy laden. ("He Heals the Heavy Laden," *Ensign*, Nov 2006, pp. 6–9)

**David A. Bednar** (Quorum of the Twelve Apostles)

I have pondered the instruction of Jacob as contained in the Book of Mormon:

“Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith becometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea.

“Nevertheless, the Lord God showeth us our weakness that we may know that it is by his grace, and his great condescensions unto the children of men, that we have power to do these things” (Jacob 4:6–7).

Brothers and sisters, please pay particular attention to the word *grace* as it is used in the verse I just read. In the [LDS] Bible Dictionary we learn that the word *grace* frequently is used in the scriptures to connote a strengthening or enabling power:

“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 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” (p. 697).

Thus, the enabling and strengthening aspect of the Atonement helps us to see and to do and to become good in ways that we could never recognize or accomplish with our limited mortal capacity. I testify and witness that the enabling power of the Savior’s Atonement is real. Without that strengthening power of the Atonement, I could not stand before you this morning.

Can we sense the grace and strengthening power of Christ in the testimony of Ammon?

“Yea, I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things; yea, behold, many mighty miracles we have wrought in this land, for which we will praise his name forever” (Alma 26:12).

Truly, brothers and sisters, in the strength of the Lord we can do and endure and overcome all

things.

As I walked out of the Church Administration Building after my interview with President Hinckley on Friday afternoon, I recalled the words of Enoch:

“And when Enoch had heard these words, he bowed himself to the earth, before the Lord, and spake before the Lord, saying: Why is it that I have found favor in thy sight, and am but a lad, and all the people hate me; for I am slow of speech; wherefore am I thy servant?

“And the Lord said unto Enoch: Go forth and do as I have commanded thee, and no man shall pierce thee. Open thy mouth, and it shall be filled, and I will give thee utterance, for all flesh is in my hands, and I will do as seemeth me good” (Moses 6:31–32).

For all of us who feel unprepared and overwhelmed and unequal to a new calling or responsibility, the promise of the Lord to Enoch is equally applicable. The promise was true in Enoch’s day, and it is true today. (“In the Strength of the Lord,” *Ensign*, Nov 2004, p. 76)

### ***The Atonement Enables Us to Overcome Our Weaknesses***

**M. Russell Ballard** (Quorum of the Twelve Apostles)

The Lord promised us through the prophet Moroni:

“If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them” (Ether 12:27).

There are several interesting things about this scripture. First is that the Lord gives us weaknesses—not sin, but weaknesses—so that we may be humble. Think about that for a moment. If we were perfect in every respect, it would be hard to be humble. Even in specific things, humility comes harder to those who are very strong in one area or another. The woman or man who is remarkably beautiful or handsome can easily become proud of her or his appearance. A brilliant scholar may look down in condescension on those less intellectually blessed. Our weaknesses help us to be humble.

Then comes the promise. If we are willing to humble ourselves, then, as it says, “my grace is

sufficient.” In the Bible Dictionary, *grace* is defined as an “enabling power” (697). Can you see the significance of that promise?

One of the signs of our day is how frequently we use the word *addiction* to describe destructive behavior. We talk about being addicted to alcohol, to drugs, to pornography. These are all insidious and powerful evils. Jesus warned His disciples that “whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34). Alma used a similar metaphor when he warned us about the “chains of hell” (Alma 12:11).

One of the most devastating effects of sin is that it weakens you, binds you, brings you down to slavery. The grace of God and of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the answer to that predicament. If you will but humble yourselves and turn to Them, then Their grace, Their enabling power, can not only help you throw off the chains of sin but actually turn your weaknesses into strengths.

Brothers and sisters, how I long to have the reality of that promise sink into your hearts. Are you struggling with some sin or weakness? It can be something as simple as not having the willpower to rise in the morning early enough to have time for scripture study and prayer. It can be something so powerful, such as Internet pornography or lack of moral self-control, that you feel you have been pulled down into an abyss and there is no hope for you. Do you find yourself hating what you are doing but not able to find the willpower to turn away from it? Then reach out and humble yourself. The Lord’s enabling power is sufficient to change your heart, to turn your life, to purge your soul. But you must make the first move, which is to humble yourself and realize that only in God can you find deliverance. (“Be Strong in the Lord,” *Ensign*, Jul 2004, p. 11-12)

### ***How to Receive the Lord’s Enabling Power?***

**Gene R. Cook** (Of the Seventy)

Perhaps some of us have not received or known how to use the great gift of grace the Father has given to us through the Atonement of His Son, Jesus Christ. “For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift?” (D&C 88:33.) The prophet Zenock even said, “Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son.” (Alma 33:16.)

How many of us, at times, try to resolve life’s

challenges ourselves, without seeking the intervention of the Lord in our lives? We try to carry the burden alone.

As some are faced with trials and afflictions, they say, “Why won’t God help me?” Some have even struggled with doubts about their prayers and their personal worthiness and say, “Perhaps prayer doesn’t work.”

Others who have suffered with sickness, discouragement, financial crisis, rejection, disappointment, and even loss of loved ones may say, “Why won’t the Lord heal me or help me with my son? Why didn’t He prevent her death? Does life have to be this unhappy?”

Yes, one might even cry out, “O God, where art thou? ... How long shall thy hand be stayed?” (D&C 121:1–2.)

Jesus taught that we pass through all these trials to refine us “in the furnace of affliction” (1 Ne. 20:10), and that we should not bear them unaided, but “in [the] Redeemer’s name” (D&C 138:13). In spite of our feeling, at times, that He has forgotten us, He testifies, “Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee ...

“Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” (1 Ne. 21:15–16.)

I testify that the Lord, through His grace, can continually assist us in our daily lives and in our physical and mental sickness, pain, transgressions, and even in all of our infirmities. (See Mosiah 14:5; Alma 7:11–13; Alma 34:31.)

However, to pass successfully through the trials we encounter, we must keep our eyes and our hearts centered on the Lord Jesus Christ. Because “since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself” (Alma 22:14); therefore, we needed an advocate, an intercessor, a mediator to assist us. “And it is *because of thy Son* that thou hast been thus merciful unto [us].” (Alma 33:11; emphasis added.)

We should have great hope in knowing, however unworthy we may feel or weak we may be, that if we will do all we can, He will come to our aid and provide for us whatever we may lack. (See 2 Cor. 12:9.) That statement, to some degree, defines grace.

Grace is a “divine means of help or strength, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ.” It is “an enabling power.” (Bible Dictionary, p. 697.) The doctrine of the grace of the Father and the Son and how it affects us is so significant that it is mentioned more than two hundred times in the standard works.

If we can obtain the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that divine enabling power to assist us, we will triumph in this life and be exalted in the life to come.

Let me share with you five principles that may help us obtain that divine intervention in our own life or perhaps vicariously assist in the life of another. These principles are simple to understand but most challenging to apply. You already know all of them. However, you may not have considered how directly related they are to obtaining grace.

**The first principle is *faith*.** “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

“By whom also we have access by faith into this grace.” (Rom. 5:1–2.)

It is evident that this grace, or enabling power, is accessed by faith. No wonder faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the first principle of the gospel.

How clear Christ’s question was to a sinking Peter, after he had walked on the water: “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” (Matt. 14:31.) The moment Peter doubted and took his eyes off the Savior, he severed himself from the power of Jesus Christ that had sustained him on the water.

How many times, likewise, as we have prayed for assistance or help with our problems, have we severed ourselves from the power of God because of doubt or fear, and thus could not obtain this enabling power of God? (See D&C 6:36; D&C 67:3.)

**Repentance is the second principle.** The grace of the Lord through the Atonement can both cleanse us of sin and assist us in perfecting ourselves through our trials, sicknesses, and even “character defects.” We are both sanctified and justified through the grace of the Lord. (See D&C 20:30–31.) Truly, “as a man his sins confess, Christ, in mercy, manifests.” (Gene R. Cook and Holly Cook, “I Am a Healthy Man,” unpublished hymn; see Alma 24:10.) Remember, Christ can repair our flaws and failings that otherwise are not repairable. (See Gen. 18:14; Mark 9:23–24.)

That great truth ought to fill us all with hope, as long as we are quick to remember that the effect of grace in our lives is conditioned upon repenting of our sins.

“Therefore, blessed are they who will repent. ...

“And may God grant ... that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works.” (Hel. 12:23–24.)

A repentant heart and good works are the very conditions required to have grace restored to us. When someone pleads fervently in prayer for an answer, the answer may be more conditioned on repentance of personal sins than on any other factor. (See D&C 101:7–8; Mosiah 11:23–24.)

**The third principle is *humility*.** “But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” (James 4:6.)

“And if men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me.” (Ether 12:27.)

Humility is an essential condition to obtaining this divine assistance.

**Doing all in your own power is the fourth principle.** Truly did Paul teach, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

“Not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Eph. 2:8–9.)

Yes, works alone cannot bring that divine gift, but they are a key condition upon which the gift is received. (See 2 Ne. 10:23–25.) “For we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” (2 Ne. 25:23.)

Thus, unless one has done all in his own power, he cannot expect the grace of God to be manifest. What a glorious principle to understand: the Lord’s assistance to us—whether we have strong faith or weak faith; whether a man, a woman, or a child—is not based just on what we know, how strong we are, or who we are, but more upon our *giving all that we can give* and *doing all that we can do* in our present circumstance. Once one has given all he can, then the Lord, through His grace, may assist him. (See D&C 123:17.)

Clearly, the Lord’s role and our role in our receiving divine help come into clear perspective in these inspired words: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Philip. 4:13.)

**The fifth principle, *keeping the commandments*,** surely is a condition for receiving the grace of the Lord. “If you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness ... ; therefore, ... you shall receive grace for grace.” (D&C 93:20; see also D&C 93:28.)

To obtain grace, one does not have to be perfect but he does have to be trying to keep the commandments the best that he can. Then the Lord may allow him to receive that power.

Moroni sums up the doctrine of grace succinctly: “If ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; ...

“Then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ.” (Moro. 10:32–33.)

What glorious gospel news is an understanding of this doctrine of grace, which persuades us to more fully center our faith and hope upon Jesus Christ. Through the grace of the Father, we will better know how to come unto the Son. (1 Ne. 15:14–15.)

Let us be submissive to the Father’s will, recognizing that His will is preeminent. How thankful we ought to be to submit to His will, because He and His Son will never do anything “save it be for the benefit of the world.” (2 Ne. 26:24.)

By seeking the intercession of the Lord more fully in our lives:

- We will “grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth.” (D&C 50:40.)
- We will “teach ... diligently and [His] grace shall attend [us].” (D&C 88:78.)
- For our labor, we will “receive the grace of God, that [we] might wax strong in the Spirit, ..... that [we] might teach with power and authority from God.” (Mosiah 18:26.)
- We will not “fall from grace.” (D&C 20:32.)
- We will “receive grace for grace” (D&C 93:20).

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16.)

I bear witness that if we will seek the grace of God, He will come to our aid and the aid of our loved ones in times of need. Let us obey the Lord in all things and offer to Him the ultimate sacrifice of “a broken heart and a contrite spirit.” (3 Ne. 9:20; see also 3 Ne. 12:19.) (“Receiving Divine Assistance through the Grace of the Lord,” *Ensign*, May 1993, pp. 79-80; **bolding and underlining have been added**)