

# PRINCIPLES OF THE ATONEMENT

handout by Ron Bartholomew

## 1. The Heaviest burden in this life is Sin

"If I were to ask you what is the heaviest burden one may have to bear in this life, what would you answer? The heaviest burden that one has to bear in this life is the burden of sin" President Harold B. Lee, Stand Ye in Holy Places, 182

The Savior's invitation to all who carry this burden: Matthew 11:28

## 2. Forgiveness is real, and repentance is accepted of the Lord, but one cannot escape the "punishment" affixed to sinning here in mortality

Alma 42:16-18

"Do you remember what was said by the prophet Alma? "Now," he said, "repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment." (Alma 42:16.) Ponder on that for a moment. Have you realized that? There can be no forgiveness without real and total repentance, and there can be no repentance without punishment." President Spencer W. Kimball, Conference Report, April 1975, 116

"Alma bluntly told his wayward son that "repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment." The punishment may, for the most part, consist of the torment we inflict upon ourselves. It may be the loss of privilege or progress. We are punished by our sins, if not for them." Elder Boyd K. Packer, Conference Report, October 1995, 22

"Throughout the repentance process we have feelings of regret, remorse, and guilt, which cause us to suffer. However, our individual suffering does not satisfy the demands of justice which follow disobedience to divine law. We cannot pay the price for our sins." Elder Ronald E. Poelman, "Divine Forgiveness," Ensign, November 1993, 85

## 3. Faith in the Savior is the beginning and the ending of the process of obtaining Divine Forgiveness and realizing the full benefits of the Atonement

"Recently I was in private conversation with one who, having committed a serious transgression, had also made intense effort to repent and receive forgiveness from those personally offended, from the Church, and from the Lord. When I asked, "Do you feel forgiven by your Heavenly Father?" he answered hesitantly with an affirmative but qualified response. "How do we obtain divine forgiveness?" I asked. He spoke of how he had forsaken his transgressive behavior of the past, confessed to proper priesthood authorities, and attempted to make restitution to those offended. He further described his efforts to live according to gospel principles and Church standards.... Despite the brother's earnest efforts to repent, he appeared to be burdened still by remorse and regret and to feel that he must continue to pay for his sins. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case. Others, to my knowledge, are burdened by past mistakes, large and small, because of an incomplete or incorrect understanding of our Father's plan of redemption and mercy. Those so burdened may unnecessarily struggle through life without the joy and peace of mind which are the intended result of true repentance and divine." As Elder Poelman visited with the young man mentioned above, he said that *faith in "the Savior and his atoning sacrifice were not mentioned"* as part of this young man's repentance process. Elder Poelman testified: "One who assumes that he can or must pay the price for his sins and thereby earn divine forgiveness will not feel free... The fact is we cannot save ourselves.... *The beginning and completion of repentance leading to forgiveness is faith in Jesus Christ, who is the "author and the finisher of [our] faith"* (Moro. 6:4) (Ibid, emphasis added)." Elder Ronald E. Poelman, "Divine Forgiveness," Ensign, November 1993, 84-85

Elder Richard G. Scott explained this further: "Formulas have been crafted to help us remember some of the essential actions required for full repentance. While these are helpful, generally they ignore the most fundamental aspect of repentance-*that it is centered in Jesus Christ and his Atonement.*" Elder Richard G. Scott, Conference Report, October 2000, 32

"Of all the necessary steps of repentance, I testify that the most critically important is for you to have a conviction that forgiveness comes because of the Redeemer.... You will be helped when you exercise *faith in Jesus Christ*. That means you trust Him and you trust His teachings ." Elder Richard G. Scott, Conference Report, April 1995, 102

Enos 1:2-6, Alma 38:8, Mosiah 4:1-3

"Once we have sufficient faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that we believe he has paid for our sins, then we will repent. And no one truly repents until he believes in Christ." Elder Hartman Rector, Jr., Ensign, November 1994, 26

## 4. Godly Sorrow is Required for Forgiveness

"Our faith in him as Savior and Redeemer engenders in us godly sorrow for our transgressions, a broken heart and a contrite spirit." Elder Ronald E. Poelman, "Divine Forgiveness," Ensign, Nov. 1993, 85

2 Nephi 2:7, 2 Corinthians 7:10

"It is not uncommon to find men and women in the world who feel remorse for the things they do wrong. Sometimes this is because their actions cause them or loved ones great sorrow and misery. Sometimes their sorrow is caused because they are caught and punished for their actions. Such worldly feelings do not constitute "godly sorrow" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Godly sorrow is a gift of the Spirit. It is a deep realization that our actions have offended our Father and our God. It is the sharp and keen awareness that our behavior caused the Savior, He who knew no sin, even the greatest of all, to endure agony and suffering. Our sins caused Him to bleed at every pore. This very real mental and spiritual anguish is what the scriptures refer to as having "a broken heart and a contrite spirit" (D&C 20:37). Such a spirit is the absolute prerequisite for true repentance. 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." Ezra Taft Benson, Teachings of President Ezra Taft Benson, 72

President Joseph Fielding Smith defined a "broken heart and a contrite spirit" this way: a *broken heart* is "one that is humble, one that is touched by the spirit of the Lord, and which is willing to abide all the covenants and obligations which the Gospel entails (Conference Report, October 1941, 93)." A *contrite spirit* is "a repentant spirit" (Ibid); one that feels a "deep sorrow for sin, a realization of the nature of the wrongdoing and a desire for forgiveness through the grace of God. A contrite spirit is essential to salvation" (Religious Truths Defined, 273.)

Joseph Fielding Smith, Conference Report, October 1941, 93

Joseph Fielding Smith, Religious Truths Defined, 273

## **5. Confession and Forsaking are also Required**

Doctrine and Covenants 58:42-43

"Perhaps confession is one of the hardest of all the obstacles for the repenting sinner... Notwithstanding the difficulty the repenting sinner may experience, the requirement remains.... The confession of his major sins to a proper Church authority is one of those requirements made by the Lord. These sins include adultery, fornication, other sexual transgressions, and other sins of comparable seriousness.... Many offenders in their shame and pride have satisfied their consciences, temporarily at least, with a few silent prayers to the Lord and rationalized that this was sufficient confession of their sins. "But I have confessed my sin to my Heavenly Father," they will insist, "and that is all that is necessary." This is not true where a major sin is involved. Then two sets of forgiveness are required to bring peace to the transgressor--one from the proper authorities of the Lord's church, and one from the Lord himself.... From the Lord's word to modern Israel--"confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord" (D&C 59:12)--it is plain that there are two confessions to make: one to the Lord and the other to "the brethren," meaning the proper ecclesiastical officers.... Confession is not only the revealing of errors to proper authorities, but the sharing of burdens to lighten them. One lifts at least part of his burden and places it on other shoulders which are able and willing to help carry the load. Confession brings peace. How often have people departed from my office relieved and lighter of heart than for a long time! Their burdens were lighter, having been shared." President Spencer W. Kimball, Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, 93-95

"Forsaking" requires "both turning away from evil *and* turning to God.... a 180-degree turn, and without looking back!" Elder Neal A. Maxwell, Ensign, November 1991, 30

"Turning away from [sin, is] a discontinuance of all evil practices... a thorough reformation of life, a vital change from evil to good... it is also essential to... diligently keep all the commandments of the Lord." President Joseph F. Smith, quoted by Elder Richard G. Scott, Conference Report, October 2000, 32

"This means that those guilty of serious transgressions who are repentant haven't really repented until they become full tithing payers, or fully overcome Word of Wisdom problems, are morally clean, and keep the Sabbath day holy." "There must be total abandonment of the sin. All too often... those who have repented slip sometime later into their old sinful ways. When that happens, previously repented sins return to those who perhaps did not really repent after all. We read: "... go your ways and sin no more; but unto that soul who sinneth shall the former sins return, saith the Lord your God." Elder Malcom S. Jeppsen, Ensign, May 1994, 18

## **6. Restitution is Required and made possible by the Power of the Atonement**

"To earn forgiveness, one must make restitution. That means you give back what you have taken or ease the pain of those you have injured.... If you have caused others to suffer unbearably-defiled someone's virtue, for example-it is not within your power to give it back. There are times you cannot mend that which you have broken.... Your repentance cannot be accepted unless there is a restitution. If you cannot undo what you have done, you are trapped. It is easy to understand how helpless and hopeless you then feel and why you might want to give up, just as Alma did. The thought that rescued Alma, when he acted upon it, is this: *Restoring what you cannot restore, healing the wound you cannot heal, fixing that which you broke and you cannot fix is the very purpose of the atonement of Christ.* When your desire is firm and you are willing to pay the "utmost farthing," the law of restitution is held in suspension. Your obligation is transferred to the Lord. He will settle your accounts. I repeat, save for the exception of the very few who defect to perdition, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. That is the promise of the atonement of Christ." Elder Boyd K. Packer, Ensign, November 1995, 19-20

**7. In order to be forgiven, we must forgive**

Elder H. Burke Peterson related the experience of a group of young people in the desert of Central Arizona. While enjoying one another's company there, one of the young ladies in the group was bit by a rattlesnake. Instead of stopping right then and extracting the venomous poison from her leg, the girl and her friends pursued the snake in hot revenge. It slipped into the undergrowth and avoided them for 15-20 minutes. Finally they found it and destroyed it. However, their vengeful act had given the venom time to move from the surface of her skin deep into the tissues of her foot and leg. When they arrived at the hospital, the venom had done its work of destruction. The young woman's leg had to be amputated below the knee. Elder Peterson related this to the venom of hatred, holding grudges, and refusing to forgive one another: "It was a senseless sacrifice, this price of revenge. How much better it would have been if, after the young woman had been bitten, there had been an extraction of the venom from the leg.... There are those today who have been bitten-or offended, if you will-by others. What can be done? What will you do when hurt by another? The safe way, the sure way, the right way is to look inward and immediately start the cleansing process.... The longer the poison of resentment and unforgiveness stays in a body, the greater and longer lasting is its destructive effect." Elder H. Burke Peterson, Ensign, November 1983, 59

Matthew 6:14-15, D&C 64:9

After World War II, Elder Ezra Taft Benson of the Quorum of the Twelve was called on a mission to relieve the European saints, and Elder Fredrick W. Babbel was assigned as his companion. Elder Babbel related the following experience regarding our need to forgive in order to obtain mercy from the Lord. He had been asked to give a special blessing to "a three-year-old boy... [who] had been deaf and mute since birth. Now his parents had brought him to London... One of the brethren anointed his head with oil, and as I placed my hands upon his head to seal the anointing and to give him a blessing, I felt that the Lord's power was present in such abundance that there was no question about his being healed instantly.

Before I could say a word, I was told by the Spirit, "This boy could be healed this very night if his parents would lose the hatred which they have in their hearts." I was decidedly shocked and troubled, because I had never before met this family and did not want to question their attitude. But I was restrained from sealing the anointing.

After a moment's pause, I removed my hands from the boy's head and said to his parents, "What is it that you hate so deeply?"

They looked startled. Then the husband said, "We can't tell you."

"I don't need to know," I replied, "but as I placed my hands upon your son's head, I was assured that he might be healed this very night and be restored to you whole if you will lose the hatred which you have in your hearts."

After some troubled glances back and forth between the couple, the husband again spoke. "Well, if that is the case," he said, "Our son will have to go through life as he is, because we won't give up our hating!"

Fredrick W. Babbel, On Wings of Faith, 160-161

"The pleading sinner, desiring to make restitution for his acts, must also forgive others of all offenses committed against him. The Lord will not forgive us unless our hearts are fully purged of all hate, bitterness, and accusation against our fellowmen.... Hard to do? Of course.... The price is high, but the goods attained are worth all they cost.... Many people, when brought to a reconciliation with others, say that they forgive, but they continue to hold malice, continue to suspect the other party, continue to disbelieve the other's sincerity.... The spirit of revenge, of retaliation, of bearing a grudge, is entirely foreign to the gospel of the gentle, forgiving Jesus Christ." Spencer W. Kimball, Teachings of President Spencer W. Kimball, 102-105

**8. The Role of the Sacrament and the Bearing of Testimony in Obtaining and Retaining Forgiveness**

"In partaking the sacrament, we can renew the effects of our baptism.... As we renew our baptismal covenants and affirm that we will "always remember Him," the Lord will renew the promised remission of our sins, under the conditions [of repentance] and at the time He chooses. One of the primary purposes and effects of this renewal of covenants and cleansing from sin is "that we may always have his spirit to be with us." Elder Dallin H. Oaks, Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 81

"Do you remember the feeling you had when you were baptized - that sweet, clean feeling of a pure soul, having been forgiven, washed clean through the merits of the Savior? If we partake of the sacrament worthily, we can feel that way regularly, for we renew that covenant, which includes his forgiveness. Those who would deny themselves the blessing of the sacrament by not attending sacrament meeting or by not thinking of the Savior during the services surely must not understand the great opportunity to be forgiven, to have his Spirit to guide and comfort them! What more could anyone ask?" Elder John H. Groberg, Conference Report Apr. 1989, 50

"It is essential that we renew our covenants by partaking of the sacrament. When we do this with a sincere heart, with real intent, forsaking our sins, and renewing our commitment to God, the Lord provides a way whereby sins can be forgiven from week to week. Simply eating the bread and drinking the water will not bring that forgiveness. We must prepare and then partake with a broken heart and contrite spirit. The spiritual preparation we make to partake of the sacrament is essential to receiving a remission of our sins." Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone, "Sacrament Meeting and the Sacrament," Ensign, September, 2001, 23

From Elder Bruce R. McConkie, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, we receive these comforting words: "The relationship between the bearing of testimony by the power of the Holy Ghost and the forgiveness of sins illustrates a glorious gospel truth. It is that whenever faithful saints gain the companionship of the Holy Spirit, they are clean and pure before the Lord, for the Spirit will not dwell in an unclean tabernacle. Hence, they thereby receive a remission of those sins committed after baptism (The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary, 4 vols., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1980, 3:40-41, n. 1)." Elder Bruce R. McConkie, quoted by Elder Ronald E. Poelman, "Divine Forgiveness," Ensign, Nov. 1993, 85

#### 9. **The Peace of Forgiveness will come to you**

"Some years ago... a fine young man came in with a troubled look on his face, and he said, "Brethren, I am going to the temple for the first time tomorrow. I have made some mistakes in the past, and I have gone to my bishop and my stake president, and I have made a clean disclosure of it all; and after a period of repentance and assurance that I have not returned again to those mistakes, they have now adjudged me ready to go to the temple. But, brethren, that is not enough. I want to know, and how can I know, that the Lord has forgiven me, also."

"What would you answer one who would come to you asking that question? As we pondered for a moment, we remembered King Benjamin's address contained in the book of Mosiah:

"... 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; ...

"... after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience. ..." (Mosiah 4:2-3.)

If the time comes when you have done all that you can to repent of your sins, whoever you are, wherever you are, and have made amends and restitution to the best of your ability; if it be something that will affect your standing in the Church and you have gone to the proper authorities, then you will want that confirming answer as to whether or not the Lord has accepted of you. ***In your soul-searching, if you seek for and you find that peace of conscience, by that token you may know that the Lord has accepted of your repentance.*** Satan would have you think otherwise and sometimes persuade you that now having made one mistake, you might go on and on with no turning back. That is one of the great falsehoods. The miracle of forgiveness is available to all of those who turn from their evil doings and return no more.... Have that in mind, all of you who may be troubled with a burden of sin." President Harold B. Lee, Ensign, July 1973, pp. 122-123

"Ultimate forgiveness comes from the Lord to the repentant individual. He or she knows by the power of the Holy Ghost when forgiveness has come." Elder Malcom S. Jeppsen, Ensign, May 1994, 18-19

#### 10. **Do Not Continue to Relive Forgiven Sin**

"If you, through poor judgment, were to cover your shoes with mud, would you leave them that way? Of course not. You would cleanse and restore them. Would you then gather the residue of mud and place it in an envelope to show others the mistake that you made? No. Neither should you continue to relive forgiven sin. Every time such thoughts come into your mind, turn your heart in gratitude to the Savior, who gave His life that we, through faith in Him and obedience to His teachings, can overcome transgression and conquer its depressing influence in our lives." Elder Richard G. Scott, Conference Report, April 1986, 13

"And when God has forgiven us, which He is so eternally anxious to do, may we have the good sense to walk away from those problems, to leave them alone, to let the past bury the past. If one of you has made a mistake, even a serious mistake, but you have done all you can according to the teachings of the Lord and the governance of the Church to confess it and feel sorrow for it and set it as right as can be, then trust in God, walk into His light, and leave those ashes behind you." Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, Conference Report, October 1996, 114