

The Mediator of the New Covenant

Robert L. Millet

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Because Adam and Eve transgressed by partaking of the forbidden fruit, they were cast from the Garden of Eden and from the presence of the Lord, resulting in spiritual death (i.e., separation from God). Consequently, blood, sweat, opposition, bodily decay, and, finally, physical death entered the world. Even though the Fall was a vital part of the great plan of the Eternal God¹—as much a foreordained act as Christ’s intercession (1 Peter 1:20)—our state, including our relationship to and contact with God, changed dramatically. The plight of the human family rested in the sobering truth that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

The Need for Mediation

All mortals desperately need help. Those who are lost need to be found. Those who are fallen need to be lifted up. Theologian John Stott has written that “Christianity is rescue religion. It declares that God has taken the initiative in Jesus Christ to deliver us from our sins.”² Elder Boyd K. Packer reminded us painfully that “each of us, without exception, one day will settle [our] spiritual account. We will, that day, face a judgment for our doings in mortal life and face a foreclosure of sorts. . . . 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.”³

Jesus was sent by the Father to show us the way back home. He is able to do so because he *knows* the way; indeed, he *is* the way (John 14:6). We can have total trust and confidence in him and rely completely upon his merits, mercy, and grace. This is what it means to have faith *in* Christ. We simply cannot be saved *in* our sins, nor can we merit anything of ourselves (Alma 11:37; 22:14). In the words of the apostle Paul, “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified” (Romans 3:20; see 2 Nephi 2:5). Because of our fallen nature, we must be justified—forgiven, pardoned, and placed once again in a proper relationship with God our Heavenly Father. We cannot fix the damaged relationship on our own, but Jesus can. Through his advocacy and mediation he is able to effect a reconciliation with God. In short, God reconciles fallen men and women to himself by Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18).

President Joseph Fielding Smith explained that “all revelation since the fall has come through Jesus Christ, who is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. In all of the scriptures, where God is mentioned and where he has appeared it was Jehovah who talked with Abraham, with Noah, Enoch, Moses and all the prophets.” Now note this important principle: “*The Father has never dealt with man directly and personally since the fall, and he has never appeared except to introduce and bear record of the Son.*”⁴ Hence, Jesus Christ is our *mediator* with God the Eternal Father.

A mediator is a “go-between” person, an intermediary between two parties, an arbitrator, one who intervenes to resolve a conflict or, in some cases, to ratify a covenant. In the Old Testament, Abraham was a mediator between God and the corrupt people of Sodom and Gomorrah. In spite of their gross wickedness, he pleaded for divine mercy in their behalf—to spare them from destruction—if he could identify but ten righteous persons in those cities (Genesis 18:22–32). Moses also served as a mediator on behalf of the children of Israel. Jehovah declared that because of their wandering rebellion he would destroy the people and basically start all over.

After Moses discovered that the Israelites had built and worshipped a golden calf, he said to the people: “Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure [perhaps] *I shall make an atonement for your sin.*” Other translations render this passage as “secure pardon for your sin” (Exodus 32:30 Revised English Bible) or “clear you of your sin” (Exodus 32:30 The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language). Then, speaking to the Lord, Moses declared: “Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold (32:31).” Now note this tender plea, a touching act of mediation: “Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and *if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written*” (Exodus 32:32; emphasis added).

The Epistle to the Hebrews opens as follows: “*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being in the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (Hebrews 1:1–3; emphasis added). John Stott observed that this passage “brings together the two major spheres of mediation, in which God has

taken action through Jesus Christ, which we usually call ‘revelation’ and ‘redemption.’ That is, God has both spoken to our ignorance through Jesus Christ, and dealt with our sins through Jesus Christ.” Stott concluded that “in the sphere of revelation Jesus was a prophet greater than Moses, and in the sphere of redemption he was a priest greater than Aaron.”²⁵

The Mediator: Man, but More than Man

Jesus the Christ stands in a most unusual position as a member of the divine family of God. He had a dual inheritance. First, he was the son of Mary, and from her he inherited *mortality*, the flesh, including the capacity to die. Jesus needed to be mortal to understand and appreciate the challenges of being a human being. Indeed, “in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren” (Hebrews 2:17). He went out into a fallen world and, day by day, encountered pain, affliction, temptation, infirmity, or weakness, “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 according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:11–12). Second, he was also the Son of God, the Almighty Elohim, and from him he inherited *immortality*, the capacity and power to live forever. The Lord stated it plainly when he taught: “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 [through his mortal inheritance], and I have power to take it again [through his immortal inheritance]. This commandment have I received of my Father” (John 10:17–18).

The Savior’s co-inheritance was absolutely necessary. Look carefully at the words of the angel to King Benjamin as he spoke of the condescension of Jehovah: “And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, *even more than man can suffer*, except it be unto death” (Mosiah 3:7; emphasis added) He also prophesied: “And lo, he cometh unto his own, that salvation might come unto the children of men even through faith on his name; and even after all this *they shall consider him a man*, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him” (Mosiah 3:9; emphasis added). Truly, Jesus of Nazareth was a man, but he was so much more than a man. Had he not had immortality within him, he could not have endured the suffering of Gethsemane and Golgotha, he could not have had the power to forgive sin and effect a mighty change in those who came to him by faith, he could not have raised himself from the tomb, from death to everlasting life.

Jesus Christ is *holy*. Charles E. Jefferson, pastor of the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City in the early years of the twentieth century, wrote:

What do we mean by holiness? We mean wholeness, full-orbed perfection. . . . Let us think about the sinlessness of Jesus. . . .

The men who were nearest to [Jesus] got the idea that he was without sin. . . . Now these men were with Jesus. They ate with him, drank with him, slept with him, they saw him in all conditions and in all moods, and under varying circumstances. They saw him hungry, angry, stern, surprised, disappointed, amazed, yet they believed that in him there was no sin. . . .

The reason we are drawn to him is because we feel instinctively that he is far above us, a man without a sin. It is this which gives the Christian church its power. The Christian church has but one perfect possession, that is Jesus. The creed of the church is not perfect, its phrases were formed by the blundering mind of man. The Bible is not perfect, it is not inerrant, it has many a flaw. The church itself is imperfect, stained through and through with sin; but Jesus of Nazareth, the head of the church, is stainless. And because he is without sin, the church will come off triumphant.⁶

Nevertheless, Jesus was subject to temptation. It was possible for him to sin. The Son of God was not spared the tauntings, buffetings, and allurements of the father of lies; Jesus knew from firsthand experience that Lucifer was, as Joseph Smith explained, an “actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being.”⁷ Some have supposed that the Savior’s confrontation with Lucifer in the Judean desert following our Lord’s baptism was the extent of his temptation (Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). This is definitely not the case. It is the Gospel writer Luke who offered this point of clarity: “And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him *for a season*” (Luke 4:13; emphasis added). Indeed, Jesus was “in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18; see Doctrine and Covenants 62:1).

We know from scripture that some of the prophets like Noah (Moses 8:27) and Job (Job 1:1) were “perfect.”⁸ That is, they were upright, whole, faithful, dependable before God, people of integrity, and steadfast in their quest to know the Lord and keep his commandments. Their lives were complete, and their faith in God was mature. Because we know they were human, however, we know also that they had at various times in their lives been guilty of sin, but had repented and been forgiven.

Jesus was different: we can say of him what can be said of no other person to inhabit earth—he was totally and completely innocent, had never taken a backward step, had never taken a moral detour, had never committed sin. In speaking to students at a Brigham Young University fireside, Elder Bruce R. McConkie stated: “We have to become perfect to be saved in the celestial kingdom. But nobody becomes perfect in this life. Only the Lord Jesus attained that state, and *he had an advantage that none of us has*. He was the Son of God, and *he came into this life with a spiritual capacity and a talent and an inheritance that exceeded beyond all comprehension what any of the rest of us was born with*.”⁹ In short, Jesus was in many ways just as we are. And yet he possessed innate powers, divine attributes, and heavenly qualities that no other mortal being possessed. Jesus himself said: “For he whom God hath sent [speaking of himself] speaketh the words of God: for God giveth him not *the Spirit* by measure, for he [the Spirit] *dwelleth in him, even the fullness*” (JST John 3:34; emphasis added). As Joseph Smith taught: “Where is the man that is free from vanity? None ever were perfect but Jesus; and why was He perfect? Because He was the Son of God, and *had the fullness of the Spirit*, and greater power than any man.”¹⁰

The Messenger of the Covenant

Jesus is our mediator in that he is the “Messenger of the Covenant.” In speaking through Malachi, Jehovah proclaimed: “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:1). One way of looking at the phrase “Messenger of the Covenant” is to see Jesus as the preeminent Prophet, the great Word of the Father, the consummate dispenser of truth. Jesus was also a restorer in his day, a legal administrator, one charged by the Father to deliver priesthood powers and keys to his appointed servants. Joseph Smith taught that Jesus “was greater than John [the Baptist], because He held the keys of the Melchizedek priesthood and kingdom of God, and had before revealed the priesthood of Moses.”¹¹ On another occasion the Prophet said, “Jesus was then the legal administrator and ordained his apostles.”¹²

In other words, Jesus Christ was the Messenger of the *gospel covenant*. Joseph Smith revealed one of the grand truths of the Restoration when he explained that “the kingdom of God was set up on the earth from the days of Adam to the present time. Whenever there has been a righteous man on earth unto whom God revealed His word and gave power and authority to administer in His name, and where there is a priest of God . . . , there is the kingdom of God.”¹³

One of the principal reasons for our Lord’s incarnation was to reveal the Father to men and women on earth. Jesus made it very clear that his Father is greater than he is (John 14:28); that “there is none good but one, that is, God” (Matthew 19:17); that God is the “Father of lights” (James 1:17); that he (Christ) came to earth to do the will of the Father (John 6:38); that the message of salvation is first and foremost “the gospel of God” (Romans 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 2:2, 8; 1 Peter 4:17); that the Father, through the Son, is reconciling the world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:18–20); and that God is in Christ, manifesting himself to the world (Hebrews 1:3; John 14:9).

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland taught that “in all that Jesus came to say and do, including and especially in His atoning suffering and sacrifice, *He was showing us who and what God our Eternal Father is like*, how completely devoted He is to His children in every age and nation. *In word and in deed Jesus was trying to reveal and make personal to us the true nature of His Father, our Father in Heaven.*” Elder Holland went on to explain that many Christians “feel distant from the Father, even estranged from Him, if they believe in Him at all. And if they do believe, many moderns say they might feel comfortable in the arms of Jesus, but they are uneasy contemplating the stern encounter of God. . . . In that sense Jesus did not come to improve God’s view of man nearly so much as He came *to improve man’s view of God* and to plead with them to love their Heavenly Father as He has always and will always love them. The plan of God, the power of God, the holiness of God, yes, even the anger and the judgment of God they had occasion to understand. But the love of God, the profound depth of His devotion to His children, they still did not fully know—until Christ came.”¹⁴

Our Lord and Savior did not, however, come to earth simply to make known certain matters, as important as they are. He came “not only to teach but to save, not only to reveal God to human beings, but also to redeem human beings for God. This is because our major problem is not our ignorance but our sin and guilt.”¹⁵

The Mediator of a Better Covenant

Following the translation of Moses, the keys of the Melchizedek priesthood were taken from the generality of the people and the Aaronic priesthood became the priesthood of administration from the days of Aaron’s sons to the coming of John the Baptist, a period of almost a millennium and a half. As given in modern revelation, because the children of Israel “hardened their hearts and could not endure his [Jehovah’s] presence,” the Lord “swore that they should not enter into his rest while in the wilderness, which rest is the fulness of his glory. Therefore, he took Moses out of their midst, and the Holy Priesthood also” (Doctrine and Covenants 84:24–25). William Clayton recorded the following remarks from Joseph Smith: “All priesthood is Melchizedek; but there are different portions or degrees of it. That portion which brought Moses to speak with God face to face was taken away; but that which brought the ministry of angels [the Aaronic] remained. All the prophets had the Melchizedek priesthood and were ordained by God himself.”¹⁶

Spiritually unprepared Israel was given a lesser gospel, a preparatory gospel, including the laws and statutes of what we know as the law of Moses. This was “a law of performances and of ordinances, a law which they were to observe strictly from day to day, to keep them in remembrance of God and their duty towards him” (Mosiah 13:30). This preparatory or lesser gospel was thus administered by a lesser priesthood, the priesthood of Aaron. When Jesus came, however, he restored the higher or Melchizedek priesthood, and with it the everlasting gospel. In this final dispensation, the Savior declared, “Blessed are you for receiving mine everlasting covenant, even the fulness of my gospel, sent forth unto the children of men, that they might have life and be made partakers of the glories which are to be revealed in the last days” (Doctrine and Covenants 66:2; see 1:22; 45:9; 49:9; 133:57).

Hence from the days of Moses to the coming of Christ, the people were given the Mosaic covenant, and with the advent of the Lord came the new and everlasting covenant. It is everlasting in the sense that it was had from the beginning, as Joseph Smith taught. It is new at any given time in that it has been restored anew through the Lord’s authorized legal administrators. Therefore, some six hundred years before what we know as the meridian of time, God spoke through Jeremiah: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that *I will make a new covenant* with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers . . . , which covenant they brake, . . . but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:31–33; emphasis added).

This prophecy was, of course, fulfilled with the coming of the Son of God, he who called all men and women under the Mosaic covenant to a higher righteousness, a righteousness consisting not of good deeds alone but also a religion of the heart, as Jeremiah learned. In other words, the restoration of the everlasting gospel in the meridian of time made Jesus “the mediator of a better covenant” (Hebrews 8:6). Through the sufferings and death of Christ, there is effected a “redemption [from] the transgressions that were under the first testament [covenant],” and by this means “they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Hebrews 9:15). In this manner, Jesus became the “mediator of the new covenant” (Hebrews 12:24).

Mediation through Prayer

A significant aspect of revealing God the Father to the people of earth is revealing how the children of God are to communicate meaningfully with the Father. The Savior himself was very clear regarding the order of prayer: we are to pray to God the Father in the name of Christ the Son. In his last supper, Jesus taught the Twelve: “And whatsoever ye shall ask *in my name*, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing *in my name*, I will do it” (John 14:13–14; emphasis added). In describing the nature of their call and divine authorization, the Lord stated, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that *whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name*, he may give it you” (John 15:16, emphasis added; see 16:23–24, 26).

The risen Lord offered similar counsel to the Nephites when he explained, “Therefore ye must always pray unto the Father in my name” (3 Nephi 18:19). And now note this vital qualification upon having those requests granted: “And whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, *which is right, believing that ye shall receive*, behold it shall be given unto you” (3 Nephi 18:20, emphasis added; see 18:23, 30). The Savior then instructed his Nephite twelve to teach the same order of prayer to the people to whom they would minister: “And the twelve did teach the multitude; and behold, they did cause that the multitude should kneel down upon the face of the earth, and should pray unto the Father in the name of Jesus” (3 Nephi 19:6). This same counsel has been offered to Latter-day Saints in modern revelation (Doctrine and Covenants 14:8; Moses 7:59).

Now, to say that we are to pray to our Father in heaven in the name of the Son is *not* to say that our prayers somehow *go through Christ*. The scriptures speak otherwise. To be sure, Christ is the way to the Father (John 14:6), and his is the only name by which salvation comes to the children of God (Acts 4:12); he is our Advocate with the Father, our Intercessor in the courts of glory. Our prayers, however, go directly to God our Father. Indeed, we are entitled to “*come boldly unto the throne of grace*, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16; emphasis added).

Someone has noted that “a true doctrine of the mediation of Jesus Christ is the ground of Christian assurance. Only when we come to God—through Jesus Christ, who died for

us—can we come with boldness instead of timidity, with confidence instead of fear.”¹⁷ The great prophet Enoch, some three thousand years before Christ came to earth, was commanded to pray to the Father in the name of the Only Begotten Son; “thou hast . . . commanded me that I should ask in the name of thine Only Begotten; thou hast made me, and given unto me *a right to thy throne*, and not of myself, but *through thine own grace*” (Moses 7:59; emphasis added).

“We pray to the Father, not the Son,” a modern apostle observed; “but according to the laws of intercession, advocacy, and mediation, our answers come from the Son.” Or, stated in a slightly different way, “proper prayers are made to the Father, in the name of the Son, by the power of the Holy Ghost. *The Father answers prayers, but he does it through the Son*, into whose hands he has committed all things.” Finally, proper prayers “are not made to Moses, the mediator of the Old Covenant, nor to Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, nor to the Holy Spirit of God.”¹⁸ In summary, we pray to God, the Eternal Father, in the name of our Mediator, Jesus Christ, and we strive to do so by the power of the Holy Ghost.

The Mediator Intercedes and Advocates

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned that no woman or man is saved by virtue of their own merits, deeds, or accomplishments, no matter how impressive they may be. We are saved because of the merits, mercy, and grace of Jesus Christ. Since he was perfect, having committed no sin and the law of justice having no claims upon him (Hebrews 7:26–27), the sinless one was in a unique position with regard to our Heavenly Father, the Man of Holiness (Moses 6:57). Jesus was and is in a position to make certain claims upon the Father, to request of the Almighty what no one of us would ever be in a position to request. His righteousness and holiness enabled and empowered him to be able to “claim of the Father his rights of mercy which he [Christ] hath upon the children of men. . . . For he hath answered the ends of the law, and *he claimeth all those who have faith in him*” (Moroni 7:27–28; emphasis added). By faith in Jesus Christ, we who have been guilty of violating God’s law are in a position to lean upon and draw strength and forgiveness from the one who did in reality live that law perfectly. We are redeemed by the righteousness of our Redeemer (Romans 10:1–4; see also 2 Nephi 2:3).

For one thing, because of our Lord’s perfection and his complete faithfulness to the laws of God, he is able to extend his righteousness to us. Now whether a person believes that Jesus *imputes* his righteousness to us (a Protestant perspective, a legal declaration describing one’s *standing* before God) or *imparts* his righteousness to us (a Roman Catholic perspective describing an actual change in one’s *state* or nature), or some of each, as in numerous Protestant-Catholic rapprochements since the Second Vatican Council, what is abundantly clear in the scriptures is that our Savior can change us, can both elevate our standing before God and sanctify our soul. Christ “is able also to save them to the uttermost [perfectly] that come unto God by him, seeing *he ever liveth to make intercession for them*” (Hebrews 7:25; emphasis added). In speaking of those who inherit the celestial kingdom, the revelation

states, “These are they who are just men [and women] *made perfect through Jesus the mediator of the new covenant*, who wrought out this perfect atonement through the shedding of his own blood” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:69; emphasis added). Thus, people who come unto Christ with full purpose of heart are “perfected in him” (Moroni 10:32).

The apostle Paul explained that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ. . . . For he [God the Father] hath made him [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:17–18, 21). This is what New Testament scholars and Christian leaders have through the years called the “great exchange” or the “great reversal.” In addition, however, Paul is explaining that Jesus came to earth *to exchange with us*. It is as though the Redeemer says to each of those who yearn for cleansing and for rest, “Come unto me, and I will take your sin. On the other hand, I will convey my righteousness to you.”

What an exchange! The late Roman Catholic scholar Richard John Neuhaus put it this way: “It was not simply that [Jesus] bore the consequences of sin, but . . . he was made to *be* sin [see 2 Corinthians 5:21, above]. The great reversal reverses all of our preconceptions.” Now note the following significant insight: “*God must become what we are in order that we might become what God is*. To effectively take our part, he must take our place.” Also, Christ “became what by right he was not, so that we might become what by right we are not. This is what Christians through the ages have called the ‘happy exchange.’ This exchange, this reversal, is at the very epicenter of the story of our redemption.”¹⁹

One Christian theologian, Donald Bloesch, described the continuing nature of the exchange in this way: “The exchanged life is an ongoing reality and not simply a change in our status before God. It is characterized by the substitution of Christ’s humility for our vanity, his courage for our fear, his love for our bitterness, his power for our weakness, his holiness for our sin.”²⁰

One of the most moving and instructive models or analogies used by the prophets to explain the Messiah’s saving labor is the law court setting. We are guilty of offenses against the law, and Jesus Christ offers to serve as our defense attorney. “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not,” declared John the Beloved. “But if any man sin and repent, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (JST 1 John 2:1). Note the following inspired language of the Prophet Joseph Smith from the dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple: “Thou art gracious and merciful, and wilt turn away thy wrath when thou lookest upon the face of thine Anointed” (Doctrine and Covenants 109:53). “I am Christ,” the Lord said in an earlier revelation, “and in mine own name, *by the virtue of the blood which I have spilt, have I pleaded before the Father for them*” (Doctrine and Covenants 38:4; emphasis added).

Jesus was fully human, meaning there was nothing about his human nature or his divine powers that would prevent him from experiencing all of the trials and traumas, the disappointments and delights of mortality. In addition, he was an infinite and eternal being (Alma 34:14) possessed of perfect love for each of us, which allowed him to have perfect empathy.

“Wherefore in all things it behoved [Christ] to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:17–18; see Alma 7:11–13; Doctrine and Covenants 62:1).

Ours, however, is definitely a different kind of law court. Normally the defense might seek to provide evidence that the accused had a sterling reputation in the community, that the crime for which he is charged is simply incongruous with the esteem with which he is held by those who know him best, that over a period of thirty years he has built a solid and enviable reputation as a city councilman, Little League coach, Scout leader, and volunteer fireman. But what would we make of a defense attorney whose opening remarks went something like the following: “Your honor, I would recommend most strongly, in order to save the time of the court and the money of taxpayers, that this charge be dismissed.” The judge might answer, “On what grounds?” The attorney’s reply: “Because of my outstanding record as a defense attorney!” The judge: “Come again?” “Well, your honor,” the confident advocate continues, “I think if you check my record you will see clearly that I have never lost a case. I am an outstanding lawyer. I really do think it would be wise to dismiss these proceedings.”

Now, if the defense attorney were not fined heavily for contempt of court, he would certainly be laughed out of the courtroom. Perhaps both. Why? Because the innocence or guilt of the accused is absolutely unrelated to the competence or effectiveness of his lawyer. In fact, one of the reasons why the Savior’s atonement can be described as “infinite and eternal” is that it defies human (mortal) law and logic. The touch of Jesus’s hand, the depth and breadth and unspeakable power of his mediation, defies what you and I understand about justice and mercy and right and wrong and restitution and punishment. Turning briefly to the Book of Mormon, we note Amulek’s words to the errant Zoramites: “It is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for *it shall not be a human [mortal] sacrifice*; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice. Now there is not any [typical mortal] man that can sacrifice his own blood which will atone for the sins of another. Now, if a man murdereth, behold will our law, which is just, take the life of his brother? I say unto you, Nay. But the law requireth the life of him who hath murdered; therefore there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world” (Alma 34:10–12; emphasis added).

C. S. Lewis has written: “Among [the] Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time. . . . Now unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic. We can all understand how a man forgives offenses against himself. You tread on my toes and I forgive you, you steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself unrobbed and untrodden on, who announced that He forgave you for treading on other men’s toes and stealing other men’s money? . . . He told people that their sins were forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured. He unhesitatingly behaved as if He was the party chiefly concerned, the person chiefly offended in all offenses. This makes sense

only if He really was the God whose laws were broken and whose love is wounded in every sin.”²¹

Conclusion

“The fundamental principles of our religion,” Joseph Smith taught, “are the testimony of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and *all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it.*”²² That singular principle puts everything else into proper perspective. If there had been no atonement of Jesus Christ, it would matter precious little to know that we lived before we were born into mortality, that all those who do not have an opportunity to hear the message of salvation in this life will have that privilege in the postmortal spirit world, that there are degrees of glory hereafter, that through those keys of the priesthood known as the sealing power, families may be linked and bound together everlastingly. In other words, if there had been no Atonement, no amount of good on our part or deep and profound doctrine could make up for the loss. “Salvation could not come to the world,” the Prophet Joseph declared, “without the mediation of Jesus Christ.”²³

Elder Boyd K. Packer spoke of these solemn matters in a related way. “Truth, glorious truth, proclaims there is . . . a Mediator,” he testified. “Through him mercy can be fully extended to each of us without offending the eternal law of justice.” Now notice what Elder Packer had to say about this key doctrine: “*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.*”²⁴ In other words, Christ is the divine center: his life and atoning sacrifice, his advocacy and mediation, together with his bodily resurrection from the dead, give meaning and purpose to everything else we do and believe.

Because God our Heavenly Father devised a plan for the regeneration of fallen mortals, we can have hope. Because, as an essential part of that great plan of happiness, Jesus the Redeemer was sent to earth to provide a system of redemption and reclamation for all who would receive it, we can rejoice. And because he has bridged the divide between fallen, mortal humanity and a holy, glorified, and exalted God, our souls can rest.



Robert L. Millet is a professor emeritus in the Department of Ancient Scripture, Brigham Young University.

Further Reading

Bloesch, Donald. *Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997.

Brown, Raymond E. *The Death of the Messiah*, 1:117–234. New York: Doubleday, 1994.

Holland, Jeffrey R. "Where Justice, Love, and Mercy Meet." *Ensign*, May 2015.

———. "None Were with Him." *Ensign*, May 2009.

McConkie, Bruce R. "The Purifying Power of Gethsemane." *Ensign*, May 1985.

Millet, Robert L. *The Atoning One*, 59–96. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018.

Stott, John. *Life in Christ*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1991.

Notes

1. Elder Orson F. Whitney taught, "The Fall had a twofold direction—downward, yet forward. It brought man into the world and set his feet upon progression's highway." *Cowley and Whitney on Doctrine*, comp. Forace Green (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963), 287.
2. John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 81.
3. Boyd K. Packer, "The Mediator," *Ensign*, May 1977, 54–55.
4. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:27; emphasis added.
5. John Stott, *Life in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1991), 12.
6. Charles E. Jefferson, *The Character of Jesus* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1908), 326, 331, 332–333, 334.
7. Joseph Smith—History 1:16.
8. In KJV Job 1:1, Job is described as "perfect," but other translations translate the original word as "blameless" (e.g., New Revised Standard Version).
9. Bruce R. McConkie, "Jesus Christ and Him Crucified," *1976 BYU Devotional Speeches of the Year* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 1977), 399; emphasis added.
10. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 53; emphasis added; cited hereafter as *Joseph Smith*.
11. *Joseph Smith*, 83.
12. *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 235; punctuation corrected.
13. *Joseph Smith*, 82.
14. Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Grandeur of God," *Ensign*, November 2003, 70–71; emphasis added.
15. Stott, *Life in Christ*, 16.
16. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 59.
17. Stott, *Life in Christ*, 18.
18. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 335, 557, 558; emphasis added.
19. Richard John Neuhaus, *Death on a Friday Afternoon: Meditations on the Last Words of Jesus from the Cross* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 30–32; emphasis added.
20. Donald Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior and Lord*, Christian Foundations series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 160.
21. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 55.
22. *Joseph Smith*, 49; emphasis added.
23. *Joseph Smith*, 48.
24. Packer, "Mediator," 56; emphasis added.