

Teaching the Fall and the Atonement: A Comparative Method

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Two principal steps in the plan of salvation are the Fall of Adam and Eve and the Atonement wrought by Christ. In theological terms, the two are juxtaposed. As Paul says, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Over the years, I have sought ways to explain the necessity of both the Fall and the Atonement to my students. Since I teach comparative world religions, I found myself using traditional Christian theology to help students understand the similarities between Latter-day Saints and other Christians on these concepts and to help them understand the contributions of Restoration thought. I do not use the comparison to denigrate the beliefs of other Christians, for their theology is firmly rooted in their interpretations of the Bible. However, because Latter-day Saints have canonical texts beyond the Bible, we believe we have additional information concerning the Fall and the Atonement. We do not offer this understanding in pride or smugness but rather as an addition to the basic principles that other Christians already understand. In other words, we build on a foundation already laid.

With this in mind, I would like to share an understanding of these central doctrines using a comparative method of presentation. Of course, I am giving my own insights into the materials considered and am not speaking for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Traditional Christianity’s View of the Fall

Traditional Christianity sees the Garden of Eden and the Fall differently than the Latter-day Saints. The traditional position is rooted in the book of Genesis, whereas the Latter-day Saint position is based

on the book of Moses, Joseph Smith's inspired translation of Genesis 1:1–6:13. Traditional Christianity holds that Adam and Eve were mortal in the Garden of Eden, that they could procreate, and that they had the ability to choose to follow God's commands or not to do so.¹ They were created to live in the garden in the presence of God. To be truly human meant that they lived with God, for humanity's chief end "is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."² They were, however, given a commandment not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they did, they would die (see Genesis 2:17). Satan cajoled Eve into eating from the tree with the promise that if she and Adam did so, they would be like gods. Traditional theology understands this decision as an act of pride that challenges God's position and is thus the ultimate sin. The results of this act were the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden, their ultimate deaths, and a warping of human nature to a greater or lesser degree, since true humanity exists only as human beings live in God's presence.

Thus, the Fall was a disaster for humanity. Because of what Eve did, human beings lost their birthright. They were ejected from the presence of God. In the thought of many traditions, Adam and Eve no longer could choose between good and evil but were turned completely away from God. Humanity inherited the sin of Adam and Eve (original sin)—the sin of pride—and that sin is passed from generation to generation and can be overcome only by an act of God. In several Christian traditions, free will was left behind in the garden. As Paul wrote, "There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Roman 3:12). The Atonement is thus necessary for all individuals if they want to enter the presence of God, and the Atonement is wholly God's act without human cooperation in many Christian traditions, especially those that have their roots in John Calvin.³

A Latter-day Saint Perspective

Latter-day Saints have a very different view from that sketched above. Rather than seeing the Fall as a disaster, we see Eve as a heroine and the Fall as an immense step forward in humanity's eternal progression. To understand this position, we must begin in the premortal realm.

Latter-day Saints believe that three things are eternal: intelligence or intelligences,⁴ matter, and energy.⁵ Human beings are as eternal as God is because their intelligences are uncreated and self-existing. At some point in time, the Father clothed intelligences with spirit bodies by a process unknown to us.⁶ Two of these spirit children were Adam and Eve. They, along with all others who were destined for earthly life,

were commanded in that premortal realm to multiply and replenish the earth (see Moses 2:28). God then placed Adam and Eve in the garden.

It is important to notice that in Latter-day Saint theology there is a tension between the Garden of Eden and the earth. Adam and Eve were commanded to multiply and replenish the earth, not the garden. Thus, the garden became a transitional destination for them. The plan of salvation given by the Father called for His children to live in mortality subject to good and evil, opportunities and trials, joys and sadness, success and failure, and growth and death. It was to the earth, not the garden, that the Savior would come. Latter-day Saints believe that the plan of salvation never called for Adam and Eve to remain in the garden—a belief in opposition to traditional Christian theology. They had to leave it, or the whole plan would be thwarted. This basic principle is essential to understanding what took place in the garden.⁷

After placing Adam in the garden, God said, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it, nevertheless, *thou mayest choose for thyself*, for it is given unto thee; but, remember that I forbid it, for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Moses 3:16–17; emphasis added). Eve was also given this command. It is important to remember that the plan of salvation demands that Adam and Eve and their offspring experience mortality, which culminates inevitably in death, on the earth.

At this point, Satan appeared on the scene and tried to get Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. In other words, he hoped to thwart God’s purposes. Eve chose to eat the fruit (for God had said that the choice was up to Adam and Eve) so that she and Adam could enter mortality with its inevitable opportunities as well as its consequence of mortal death. But only in mortality can growth take place with the possibility of becoming all that God wishes His children to be—that is, like Him. By leaving the security of the garden, Adam and Eve and all their posterity had the potential to become—through Christ—all that God would have them be. Had they remained in the garden, there would have been no human race, and the spirit children of God would have been forever locked in their first estate, with no future before them.

What then does this say about the commandment God gave Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil? The answer is that nowhere in scripture do we have a full account of what took place in the garden surrounding that command. It cannot have meant that Adam and Eve were not to leave the garden, for that would

have contradicted the plan of salvation itself. We must look for further insights to provide the command's context, a context that is partially missing in the canonical accounts.

What do we know for certain about Adam, Eve, and the garden? We know that the garden was a transitional location. We know that Adam and Eve were told not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they were also told that it was up to them to decide whether they would eat. We know that if they did so, the penalty would be death. We also know that to progress, they were *expected* to eat of the tree, and we know that they did what God expected and required of them. What, therefore, did God really say to them in the garden? I suggest that He might have said something like the following: "If you want to stay in the Garden of Eden with no cares and no possibility for growth, you should not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. However, if you desire to grow and receive all that I have in store for you, you will have to leave the garden. If you eat of the tree, you will be cast out of the garden into the earth and into mortality, and you will die both temporally and spiritually, but you will open the door for yourselves and for all humanity to receive eternal life like I have. The choice is yours." In other words, God gave them information.

Eve understood this, at least in part, and chose to leave the garden, taking with her Adam, who realized the correctness of the decision. Thus, the first step in our eternal progression was taken, and the hosts of heaven shouted for joy, for they had a future—thanks to the courage of Adam and Eve.

What of the transgression of Adam and Eve? If they did only what God asked of them, how could there be transgression? Elder Dallin H. Oaks provided insight when he said the following:

When Adam and Eve received the first commandment, they were in a transitional state, no longer in the spirit world but with physical bodies not yet subject to death and not yet capable of procreation. They could not fulfill the Father's first commandment without *transgressing the barrier* between the bliss of the Garden of Eden and the terrible trials and wonderful opportunities of mortal life. . . . It was Eve who first transgressed the *limits of Eden* in order to initiate the conditions of mortality. Her act, whatever its nature, was formally a transgression but eternally a *glorious necessity* to open the doorway toward eternal life. Adam showed his wisdom by doing the same. And thus Eve and "Adam fell that men might be" [2 Nephi 2:25]. . . . Elder Joseph Fielding Smith said: "I never speak of the part Eve took in this fall as a sin, nor do I accuse Adam of a sin. . . . This was a transgression of the law, but not a sin . . . for it was something that Adam and Eve had

to do!” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56], 1:114–15). . . . [This] echoes a familiar distinction in the law. Some acts, like murder, are crimes because they are inherently wrong. Other acts, like operating without a license, are crimes only because they are legally prohibited. Under these distinctions, the act that produced the Fall was not a sin—inherently wrong—but a transgression—wrong because it was formally prohibited.⁸

Notice that Elder Oaks speaks of “transgressing the barrier between . . . the Garden . . . [and] mortal life” and transgressing “the limits of Eden.” As suggested above, the law, or what I called information, given by God had only to do with staying in the garden. It stated the parameters within which Adam and Eve had to operate if they wished to remain in the garden. To choose to leave the garden, however, was not to go against God’s will, for His will was that they leave, since that was part of the plan of salvation. They chose to leave that they might grow, thereby transgressing the parameters associated with staying in the garden. Thus, they were ushered by God into a new and challenging dimension of life. They entered mortality, where they would face challenges of all kinds, but these were for their sakes (see Moses 4:23)—that is, for their own good and growth. In the garden, they were immortal and unable to procreate but possessed agency; on the earth, they were mortal, could procreate, and still could distinguish good from evil. They could choose for or against God. They could truly worship God, since they could also choose to turn away from Him.

Adam and Eve sum up the consequences of their choice well: “And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled, and began to prophesy concerning all the families of the earth, saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression [or choice] my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God” (Moses 5:10). Eve gently reminded him that were it not for *their* choice, which Adam would not have made without her (she having heard the whisperings of the Spirit), they would not have had blessings even greater than those that Adam articulates. “And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression [or choice] we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” (Moses 5:11).

Thus, Eve, for Latter-day Saints, becomes the heroine who, by her choice, gives all humankind the opportunity for eternal life. Adam and

Eve, by their decision to fall from the garden into the telestial environment, conveyed to all their posterity spiritual death, which is separation from the Father, and temporal death, which is death of the physical body. The basic spiritual nature of humanity was not altered—we were and are still able to say both yes and no to God. We still retain our agency, but we have within us good and evil inclinations that may be followed. Satan tries to lead us to follow our evil inclinations—“the natural man”—while the Lord Jesus Christ calls us to follow our good or “spiritual” inclinations so that we may return to the presence of Heavenly Father. All of us receive these possibilities and consequences from the choice made by Adam and Eve. In Latter-day Saint thought, the Atonement deals with the consequences of that choice and enhances the possibilities of all human beings.

The Atonement

The Atonement overcomes the consequences of the Fall and human sin. While still wanting to work in a comparative manner, I will not separate traditional and Latter-day Saint approaches to this topic as clearly as I did for the previous one because they share much in common. In this case, I will speak from a Latter-day Saint perspective and indicate as we progress how it differs from mainline Christian theology.

Within the traditional Christian theological discussion of the Atonement, some have believed that the Atonement was *unconditional* in its effects; in other words, all persons received its benefits. They argued that Jesus died for the sins of the world, and if He did so, there were no sins left for which persons could be punished. This position usually led to a doctrine of universal salvation.⁹ On the other hand, the majority of Christians have held that the Atonement is *conditional* in nature, that persons have to appropriate it in some way for themselves. Normally, this meant that to be saved, they at a minimum had to have personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This position led to a belief that only some persons—those who choose Christ or those who are the “elect” among Calvinists—are saved through the Atonement.

Latter-day Saints do not believe the issue is an either-or situation but rather hold that both aspects apply. We believe that certain unconditional aspects of the Atonement affect all human beings, regardless of their faith. At the same time, we believe that certain conditional aspects of the Atonement are predicated on some response or action of the human being. In Latter-day Saint thought, the *unconditional* aspects of the Atonement deal with the effects of the Fall, whereas the *conditional* aspects deal with individual sin.

The unconditional aspects of the Atonement. As a result of our first parents' choice, all humanity inherited both temporal and spiritual death. We clearly understand temporal death; it is the death of the body and the culmination of mortality. Spiritual death is separation from the Father. That is why Jehovah is the active deity throughout the Old Testament history. In conjunction with Him, the Holy Ghost has always worked throughout human history. Thus, since temporal and spiritual death are the unconditional consequences of the Fall, the Atonement must deal with these two elements. And deal with them it does. Temporal death is unequivocally overcome by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. As noted before, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22; emphasis added). Here the emphasis is on the latter part of the statement, for saint and sinner alike will be resurrected; thus, temporal death is overcome for all. The issue becomes less clear for students when asked whether the effects of spiritual death are universally overcome for all. Many say that they are not, holding that overcoming spiritual death depends upon individuals accepting Christ. They are not wholly wrong in this statement, but they miss a step in the process by taking this position so quickly.

The second Article of Faith states, "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression." Since spiritual death is a universal consequence of Adam and Eve's choice, if it is not overcome for *all by the Atonement*, then the second Article of Faith is not true. Spiritual death would still be in effect, and we would be cut off from God for something we did not do. In essence, some form of original sin would have been transmitted from Adam and Eve to all their descendants. It is precisely against this that the second Article of Faith argues.

What then is the reality? Spiritual death is overcome for all in that all will return to the Father for judgment in His presence. Three Book of Mormon passages tell us this clearly:

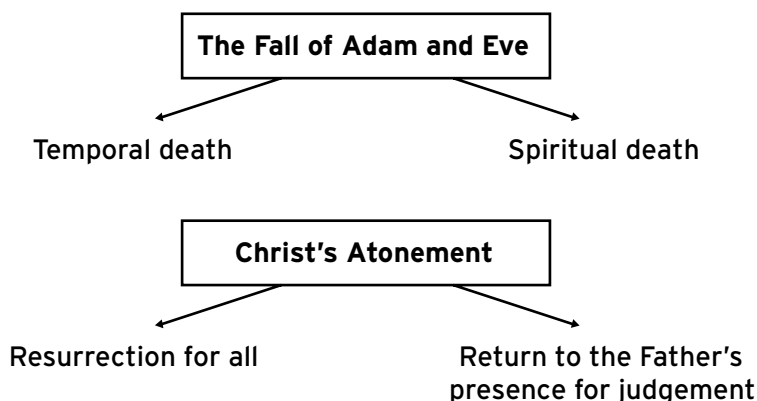
Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. Wherefore,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

as he shall make intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved. And because of the intercession for all, *all men come unto God*; wherefore, they stand in the presence of him, to be judged of him according to the truth and holiness which is in him. (2 Nephi 2:6–10; emphasis added)

Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. (Alma 11:44)

For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and cometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord. Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—*that spiritual death*; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual. But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even *all mankind*, and *bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord*. (Helaman 14:15–17; emphasis added)

If a return to the Father's presence were not to occur, judgment and exclusion from Him would have little meaning, for we would not know what we had lost. Only through returning to the Father can those who will ultimately be excluded from His presence by the Son understand the depth of their loss (see John 5:22, 27). Thus, the question is not whether all persons will eventually return to the presence of the Father (they will) but rather whether they will get to stay. The conditional effects of the Atonement resolve this issue. Hence, the unconditional effects arising from the choice of our first parents—temporal and spiritual death—are unconditionally removed by the Atonement in the form of the Resurrection and a return to the Father's presence for judgment. All who are the descendants of Adam and Eve are made alive physically and spiritually (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Unconditional Effects of the Atonement

The conditional aspects—and what we must do to benefit. But to what degree are people made spiritually alive? The degree to which we enjoy life beyond death is predicated on the degree to which we receive the effects of the Atonement *in the manner that the Lord has prescribed*. This is the conditional element. Human beings do not set the ground rules for proper reception of the Atonement; God does. If we choose to access the Atonement in the ways and places that God offers it to us, we may enjoy all that God has in store for us. However, if we ignore God's ways, we will not receive all that He wishes us to have.

The conditional effects of the Atonement from a Latter-day Saint perspective begin with the assumption that all human beings have sinned and need to have the Atonement applied to them. This perspective also assumes that humans may stand before God with one of two attitudes—humility or pride. We will first follow the results of humility.

Humility. If persons stand before God with humility, they will do all that He asks them to do—that is, they will receive the effects of the Atonement into their lives through the channels of grace that God offers to them. The first of these channels is known among Latter-day Saints as the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, which are articulated in the fourth Article of Faith: “We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. From a general Christian perspective, persons who do not know Christ do not realize that they need a savior. They have no tension in their lives between what God calls them to

be and what they are.¹⁰ It is the encounter with Jehovah (Jesus) that creates a profound awareness of human inadequacy before God. We see this in Isaiah's encounter with Jehovah in the temple. His response to the vision is not, "Wow! I've seen God!" but rather, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). We find precisely the same reaction to Jesus (this time it is Jesus rather than the premortal Jehovah) in Luke 5:8. Following the great catch of fish, Peter falls down at Jesus's feet and says, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." In both instances, it is the encounter with the second member of the Godhead that leads to a realization of personal sin and a need to change. Thus, it is the *Christian* Paul who exclaims, "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin" (Roman 7:19, 24–25). This is the tension of the Christian life for those who have encountered Jesus.

Repentance. This encounter leads to the second principle of the gospel, repentance. This sense of desperation before Christ leads Christians to realize their need to change, while people's faith in Christ gives them the courage to confront their sins. With Him there is hope for the future despite our human nature.

Repentance is a radical change of direction in a sinner's life. It is the product of being born again in Christ (traditional Christian terms) or experiencing a mighty change of heart (Latter-day Saint terminology). Repentance is the human commitment to live as God would have us live. It is the process of turning from human interests to God's interests. It is being obedient to God's commands and seeking to do the works that Christ would have us do.

Having said this, I know of no thinking Christian who does not believe that the Atonement is appropriated through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and through repentance. Latter-day Saints are at one with their brothers and sisters of all Christian denominations on these two principles. But Latter-day Saints see these as incomplete in themselves.

Baptism. Latter-day Saints believe that baptism for the remission of sins is an essential ordinance (sacrament) of the gospel, and there is no salvation without it for those who have attained the age of accountability because God has commanded this ordinance. Baptism must be by full immersion and be administered by a person who holds the

authoritative priesthood of God, which resides only in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Because of this belief in the essential role of the authoritative priesthood, Latter-day Saints evangelize Christians and non-Christians alike. We know that our Christian brothers and sisters know Christ, but without the essential ordinances of the gospel administered by the priesthood, nobody can receive all that the Father has in store. Latter-day Saints believe that there is “more” to Mormonism. First and foremost, that “more” is the authority exercised by the priesthood.

As with other Christians, Latter-day Saints see baptism as a symbol of dying and rising with Christ. But it is more. It is a sign of a person’s willingness to do all that the Father asks. It is a sign of obedience or discipleship. Alma the Elder puts it this way:

Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light;

Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—

Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon you? (Mosiah 18:8–10)

Latter-day Saints understand the act of baptism to be a covenant among themselves, Christ, and the Father that enables the Holy Ghost to be in their lives. A significant facet of this is discipleship, which seeks to follow the commandments of God. Baptism is not merely entry into the Church but the beginning of a way of life—a Spirit-filled life—and the covenants are renewed weekly with the sacrament (meaning the Lord’s Supper, or the Eucharist).

Most other Christian traditions emphasize baptism as a necessary part of Christian life. However, if one professes faith in Christ and dies before receiving baptism, most traditions would hold that the person is saved. Even Roman Catholicism has softened its stance, stating that desire to be baptized is sufficient.¹¹ Some traditions, like some Baptists, claim that without baptism a person is not saved, so there is no further hope for that individual. In contrast, Latter-day Saints are unique in

claiming that the gospel is preached beyond the veil of death. Even so, those who receive the gospel in the spirit world must receive baptism by proxy. This is one of the essential ordinances done for the dead in the temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The story of Naaman, the Syrian general who had leprosy, is an excellent example of why baptism must be done as God asked (see 2 Kings 5:1–15). As we know, Naaman had leprosy. An Israelite maid in his retinue told him that there was a prophet in Israel who could heal him, so Naaman traveled to Israel to see the prophet Elisha. However, Elisha simply sent his servant out to tell Naaman to wash in the river Jordan seven times and he would be healed. Naaman was offended that the prophet had not met him himself and went away angry. Finally, one of his officers reminded him that he would have done something difficult if he had been asked to do so. Therefore, why not do something simple? Naaman did, and he was healed. Had he not followed the directions of God through the prophet Elisha, he would have retained the leprosy. Had he washed in a Syrian river, he would not have been healed. He had to do what God asked of him. Then, and only then, did he benefit. The same is true of baptism. If God asks us to demonstrate our faith in Him by being baptized under the hands of a person holding the priesthood of God and if we choose not to do so, we are culpable and can never receive the fullest of God's blessings. Obedience is not a dirty word but rather is part of the necessary human response to the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We do the works Christ calls us to do.

The essential nature of baptism for the remission of sins for those who have reached the age of accountability separates Latter-day Saints from other Christians. Without baptism under the hands of one holding the authority of the priesthood, the ordinance or sacrament is not saving. It may lead us closer to Christ and strengthen our faith, but it is still not a saving ordinance. Thus, the issue of priesthood authority is the primary issue separating Latter-day Saints from other Christians.

Gift of the Holy Ghost. A well-known passage in the Book of Mormon states: "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*" (2 Nephi 25:23; emphasis added).

Many Latter-day Saints understand this to mean that grace completes whatever human beings are unable to do toward their own salvation. Thus, for many, there is no rest in the gospel. There is a constant striving and fear that they have not done enough to merit or earn

grace sufficient for their salvation. But grace earned or merited is *not grace*. It is precisely because so many Latter-day Saints misunderstand this text that Stephen E. Robinson wrote his book *Believing Christ*.¹² He sought to teach that grace and works are not synonymous.

Is there another way to look at 2 Nephi 25:23 than the one that sees grace completing human works? What does God really expect human beings to do to appropriate the Atonement of Jesus Christ? We have already answered that question when we spoke of the first principles of the gospel. God expects us to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to repent of our sins, and to be baptized for the remission of our sins. When we do as He has asked, we are in the kingdom of God. We are not still standing on the outside looking in.

When encountered by God through Christ, we have the ability to say both yes and no to Him. If we say yes, we will want to repent and receive baptism under the hands of one holding the authority of the priesthood. This is all that we can do. We can accept these three channels of grace, channels that uniquely access Jesus Christ, and “present [our] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is [our] reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). When we have come to God through Christ in faith, repentance, and baptism, the Father gives us a gift—the gift of the Holy Ghost—through the laying on of hands by one holding priesthood authority. This gift does two things: (1) it is God’s affirmation that though not perfect in ourselves, we stand before God clothed in the perfection of Christ and (2) it provides the power to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ, a power not inherent in the natural person.

One of the privileges of being a bishop is the opportunity to ask the temple recommend questions of ward members. When I asked my ward members if they had a testimony of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, I always received a firm “yes.” But I followed that with the question, “If you were to die tonight, would you go to the celestial kingdom?” This is when they began to squirm because they did not understand the Atonement and how it is received. They believed that they had to be a disciple of Jesus before they could receive grace, when in fact discipleship is the *result* of having received grace.

Next, I asked them if the Holy Ghost was present in their lives. Inevitably, the answer was again “yes.” I then explained that the Holy Ghost was God’s gift to affirm that He approved of them. They were not perfect, but they participated in Christ’s perfection through the Holy Ghost, which applies the Atonement daily to each one of us, if we let the Spirit do so. The Holy Ghost is God’s seal on us in the same

way that a seal validates a document.

A dynamic relationship exists among the Atonement of Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost, and human responsibility. Some Christian traditions focus on the role of Christ's Atonement and the Holy Ghost to the exclusion of human responsibility. Some Latter-day Saints focus on human responsibility to the exclusion of the Atonement and the Holy Ghost. Neither approach is fully correct because all three elements must be present. We are called by God to receive Christ, repent, and be baptized. In response, He gives the Holy Ghost, who applies the Atonement to us daily. Thus, if the Holy Ghost is present in our lives, we have a direct, experiential witness from God that were we to die tonight, we would go to the celestial kingdom. Our response to other Christians who ask us if we are saved should be, "Yes, because the Holy Ghost is in my life." If, however, the Spirit is not with us, we should repent and bring our lives back into harmony with the channels of grace that God has so graciously offered to us so that we might return to Him through Christ Jesus our Lord. The Atonement becomes operative for us, and Christ bears the consequences of our personal sins for us when the Spirit resides with us.

Enduring to the end. While not formally one of the first principles and ordinances of the gospel, enduring is something of which we often speak as Latter-day Saints. Enduring to the end is often understood as gritting our teeth and just hanging on day by day. But to live life in this manner is to forget that we exist "that [we] might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). There must be more to enduring than we see on the surface, even though the word *endure* or some form of it is used in the Book of Mormon twenty-four times and in the Doctrine and Covenants fifteen times. In reality, *endure* is shorthand for the full phrase that is used four times in the Doctrine and Covenants: "endure in faith" (D&C 20:25, 29; 63:20; 101:35). Thus, this principle leads us back to the first principle, which is "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." We are to endure in our relationship with the Savior day in and day out no matter what we encounter, for He is God's ultimate channel for grace.

But part of enduring in faith is to find Christ in all the places where He makes Himself available to us, and the most constant and available channel is the temple. Often I will abbreviate *endure* as *end.* *End.* can mean to endure in faith, but to me it also means *endowment.* The endowment is the ultimate revelation of the meaning of the Savior in the lives of Latter-day Saints. Latter-day Saints who do not take advantage of this special channel to Christ are no better off than their Protestant and Catholic neighbors, for the temple is the ultimate sym-

bol for Latter-day Saints. It is there that we can be in closest contact with the Lord as well as be a part of the community of Saints both living and dead.

For a Latter-day Saint to claim to be a faithful member of the Church and not go to the temple if given the opportunity is to deny the very faith he or she professes. Discipleship means not only professing to believe in Christ but also coming to Him wherever He makes Himself available through the priesthood, and He is most available in the ordinances of the Church—baptism, confirmation, the sacrament, blessings, and particularly in the ordinances of the endowment. Christ has called us to come to the Father through Him, and discipleship includes obedience by coming in the way the Father has asked us to come. We are not to come merely in faith and repentance but in all the other ways the Father has provided for us.

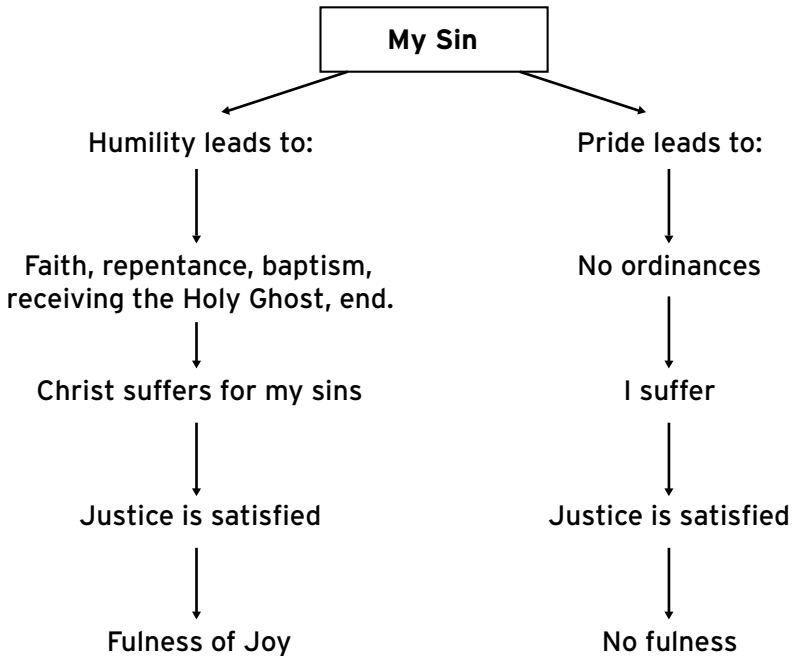
God's Justice Satisfied

Latter-day Saints often say that mercy cannot rob justice. What they, along with other Christians, are saying is that God's law is to be taken seriously. It is not sufficient to say that we are sorry for having broken it. If God's law is broken, justice expects a penalty to be paid. This is why repentance is not the first principle of the gospel. Instead, it is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who wish to have their sins removed cannot merely repent; they must come to Christ because He will bear their sins away. In a very real sense, repentance is an act of love for Christ, who has of His own free will taken our burdens upon Himself. To let Him bear our burdens and not thank Him through a changed life of repentance and discipleship would be to reject Him and His gift of grace. Thus, when He takes our sins upon Himself, justice is satisfied. It has been paid by the Savior.

If we in humility receive the Atonement in the manner God has prescribed, using the priesthood of God found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the authoritative channel through which the Atonement is effective, then all that God has for us is open to us. We may dwell with the Father in the celestial kingdom, clothed in the perfection of Jesus Christ, and thus become more and more like our Savior.

If, however, we choose not to receive the Atonement through the channels God has given, if we stand pridefully before God asserting that we know better than He how to gain His presence, we will not receive the full effects of the Atonement.

Figure 2. Conditional Effects of the Atonement



As stated earlier, all thinking Christians believe that we receive the Atonement through faith and repentance, but because Latter-day Saints hold that the ordinances of the gospel—administered by the authoritative priesthood—are essential channels of grace that all must experience, we proclaim the “more” of Mormonism to all persons, Christian and non-Christian alike. To reject the saving ordinances of the gospel is to reject Christ, at least in part, and thus His Atonement is not fully effective. We must pay, at least partially, for our own sins, and we can never do enough works to atone for our sins.

Justice *is* satisfied, if we wish to suffer for our sins, but since we can never remove them through works—even works coupled with faith and repentance, since God asked us to participate in saving ordinances—a fulness of joy is not open to us. We may dwell with Christ and the Holy Ghost in the terrestrial kingdom, or we may dwell with the Holy Ghost in the telestial kingdom, but the fulness of joy to be found in the presence of all three members of the Godhead in the celestial kingdom is closed to those whose pride prevents them from coming to the Father in the manner He has prescribed (see figure 2).

Conclusion

Living a mortal life, subject to both spiritual and temporal death, has eternally been part of the plan of salvation for all human beings. But mortality can be forced on no one, since to do so would violate the eternal nature of agency. Thus, Adam and Eve had to choose to become mortal, as did all human beings. They chose to leave the perfection and security of the Garden of Eden by transcending its limits through eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Through this act, they and their descendants became subject to temporal death and to spiritual death. Both of these effects are removed unconditionally by the Atonement of Jesus Christ through His Resurrection and through the redemption that He wrought, both of which bring all into the presence of the Father for judgment through Christ.

Personal sins are also removed through the Atonement of Jesus Christ if we are willing to accept it by utilizing the channels of grace offered by the Father: faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism for the remission of sins under the hands of one holding the authority of the priesthood, reception of the Holy Ghost, and enduring in faith in Christ through discipleship and through participating in the sublime ordinances of the temple, which bring us most nearly to Christ. **RE**

Notes

1. See Roger R. Keller, "Adam: As Understood by Four Men Who Shaped Western Christianity," in *The Man Adam*, ed. Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 151–88.

2. "The Shorter Catechism," in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Part I: Book of Confessions* (New York: Office of the General Assembly, 1983), 7.001.

3. "The Westminster Confession," in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church*, 6.016–6.020, 6.061–6.062, 6.064–6.067.

4. There is a polite debate among Latter-day Saints as to whether intelligence in a generic way is eternal and becomes personal only at the time that the Father clothes intelligences with spirit bodies or whether individual intelligences are eternal and are individually clothed with spirit bodies. I believe the latter to be correct, for it better answers the question of the origin of evil, laying it clearly on the doorstep of individuals. God is not the author of evil but rather eternal individuals are. Truman G. Madsen states, "Your autobiographical thread leads backward through the lineage of Deity and on to the original individual unit called 'intelligence.' In it, in miniature, is the acorn of your potential oak, the unsculptured image of a glorified personality" (*Eternal Man* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970], 17).

5. This view of the eternal nature of matter and energy is in harmony with

the laws of conservation of matter and energy, which can neither be created nor destroyed. It also is in harmony with Einstein's theory of the relationship between matter and energy expressed in his famous equation $E=mc^2$. Joseph Smith stated, "Anything created cannot be eternal; and earth, water, etc., had their existence in an elementary state, from eternity" (*History of the Church* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978], 3:387).

6. Lowell Bennion, *The Religion of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: LDS Department of Education, 1940; 1956 reprint), 55.

7. There are four basic accounts of the creation: Genesis, Moses, Abraham, and the one given in the temple. In what follows we will essentially follow the Moses account, recognizing, however, that further information given by the Spirit in the temple cannot be explicitly stated but lies behind what is said here.

8. Dallin H. Oaks, in Conference Report, October 1993, 97–98; emphasis added.

9. Karl Barth comes close to this perspective in his *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1946–62), II/2, 471 ff.; IV/3, 478, although according to Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 111, Barth never fully opens that door. But since Barth rejects any concept of synergism, it is hard to see how universal salvation can be anything but a fact (*Church Dogmatics*, II/2, 180 ff.), since Christ is the one elect and the one reprobate person. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, 1974), 151–52, believes Barth's logic inevitably leads to universal salvation.

10. Although persons who are not Christian but still try to serve God as He has made Himself known to them can have the tension between good and evil in their lives, they generally hold that they can bridge the gap between themselves and God through repentance. Christians of all traditions believe this is inadequate because they know Christ and thus know that there is a savior for them.

11. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), section 1259, p. 352: "For catechumens who die before their Baptism, their explicit desire to receive it, together with repentance for their sins, and charity, assures them the salvation that they were not able to receive through the sacrament."

12. Stephen E. Robinson, *Believing Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).