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## THE GRACE AND MERCY OF JESUS CHRIST

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*Gerald N. Lund*

In the tenth chapter of Romans, the Apostle Paul said: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9). Based on that and other statements by Paul, many in the Christian world believe that "being saved," or being "born again," involves making a "decision for Jesus," which is a formal confession of belief in Christ. Usually the confession is formed something like, "I accept Jesus Christ as my personal Savior." Most of these people believe that a life of good works, or striving to live as Christ would have us live, is important, but it is not what saves us. A few denominations say that confession alone is sufficient to save and that works of any kind are not required.

As a young missionary laboring in an area with a significant population of evangelical or born-again Christians, as

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*Gerald N. Lund, who served for many years in the Church Educational System, was called in April 2002 as a member of the Second Quorum of the Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.*

they sometimes refer to themselves, I was more than once asked, "Have you been saved?" At first that question threw me. In my mind, salvation was a final state not achieved until the next stage of our existence. But when I answered, "No, not yet," I quickly learned that such a response won me a pitying look and a stern lecture. How could I possibly be out trying to share a message of Jesus Christ when I hadn't yet been saved? I also learned that "being saved" had a very different meaning to them than it did to Latter-day Saints.

These people were sincere, devoted Christians and diligent students of the Bible. When we tried to suggest that something more than a mere verbal confession was required, that a life of good works was expected, they would agree that good works were the result of this decision but were not what saved us. They would cite passages from Paul's writings such as:

- "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (Romans 3:20).
- "A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28).
- "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, . . . for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Galatians 2:16).
- "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

I am now embarrassed to admit that I once got so frustrated after a particularly brutal session with a Christian minister that I suggested to my companion that we would have a lot less grief as missionaries if Paul had not said quite so much on this topic. How shortsighted and foolish to think that the root of the problem was in Paul's understanding of the gospel and not my own. I can now say without reservation that I am grateful that Paul was such a strong defender of the doctrine

of salvation by grace. I also understand better why he so vigorously attacked the heresy that mankind could be saved by their own efforts. This is not just "Paul's doctrine," as I once thought, but is taught throughout the scriptures, including the Book of Mormon.

Coming to better understand the infinite grace and mercy of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ is critical to our understanding of the gospel. It is one of the most important—if not the most important—aspects of Christ's mission, ministry and message.<sup>1</sup>

In the Book of Mormon, Alma quotes a startling passage from the prophet Zenock. Zenock wrote: "Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because . . ." Let's stop there for a moment. If one were to ask people not familiar with that scripture to guess how that sentence will be completed, most would say, "God is angry because of the people's sin or wickedness." This expectation—which is quite reasonable—makes what follows all the more startling. Zenock says: "Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, *because they will not understand thy mercies* which thou has bestowed upon them because of thy Son" (Alma 33:16; emphasis added). Remembering this warning given by Zenock, I will focus in this paper only on two aspects of Christ's grace: (1) The various manifestations of His grace; and (2) how we can more fully receive the grace and mercy of Christ in our lives.

### THE MANIFESTATIONS OF GRACE

It probably is not possible for man to fully comprehend the extent of the grace of God and all of the manifestations through which that grace is exhibited. Some are more frequently talked

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1. Though this paper refers to the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ, as do the scriptures, we should remember that it is the mercy and grace of the Father as well. As Jesus often noted, He and the Father are one in all things.

about than others. Many probably pass unrecognized by the mass of humanity.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie listed six of the more important facets of grace. These are:

- The establishment of the plan of salvation.
- The Father and the Son created this earth for us and all things in it.
- Adam and Eve came to the earth to provide a way for us to continue our progression.
- Because He so loved the world, God gave His Only Begotten Son as a sacrifice for sin. This sacrifice ransomed us from death and made possible the immortality and eternal life of man.
- God created our physical bodies and is, as King Benjamin says, "preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, even supporting you from one moment to another" (Mosiah 2:21).
- After death we will be resurrected and be given an immortal body.<sup>2</sup>

Elder McConkie noted that no action or works of any kind on our part were required for any of these things to happen. Then he concluded with this statement about God's grace: "Truly, there is no way to overstate the goodness and grandeurs and glories of the grace of God which bringeth salvation. Such wondrous love, such unending mercy, such infinite compassion and condescension—all these can come only from the Eternal God who lives in eternal life and who desires all of his children to live as he lives and be inheritors of eternal life."<sup>3</sup>

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2. See Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrines of the Restoration: Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie*, ed. Mark L. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 74.

3. *Ibid.*, 74.

Elder McConkie listed those manifestations of God's grace given to all mankind. There is another marvelous gift offered to all but received only by those willing to meet certain conditions. The importance of this gift cannot be overemphasized, and no list of the manifestations of God's grace should overlook it, even though it is widely recognized in the Church as being one of the marvelous gifts of God. I speak of the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Life is too complex for a rule book. No set of guidelines, no, not even the holy scriptures, could be written in a way so as to give specific guidelines for every person in every possible situation. There is only one hope for us mortals if we are ever to return to live with the Father in eternal life: we need the personal guidance, the constant teaching, and the daily tutoring of God. And this is the function of the Holy Spirit. He knows all things and so can guide us, warn us, teach us, and comfort us as we strive to make our way back to the Father.

It is important to note that the scriptures always refer to this as a gift, and rightly so. A wage is what is paid for work rendered. A gift is something given when nothing is owed. It is true that the Lord has set some conditions—faith, repentance, baptism—for obtaining this gift, but it is a gift nevertheless. Who of all of us sinful, shortsighted, finite, and imperfect people could ever live worthy enough to merit the companionship of a member of the Godhead? The answer is obvious. There is nothing we could ever do that would merit such a supernal gift. It comes given only through the infinite and endless mercy of God.

One day it occurred to me that in addition to the manifestations listed above, there are other manifestations of God's grace that may not at first be as obvious to us. I would like to mention two here. The first is what I call the "tithing

principle." The second is that God's grace is immediately offered to us.

The scriptures make it clear that all things on this earth belong to God. He created the world and therefore, as He says, "all things therein are mine" (D&C 104:14). He has chosen to share that "personal property" with His children in all of its richness and abundance. One of the greatest of all human failings is the tendency to claim ownership of that which actually belongs to God. We purchase a car or discover a gold mine or raise a bumper crop of wheat or invent a new technology and say, "This is mine." That God tolerates our selfish and short-sighted view is, in and of itself, a marvelous demonstration of His grace. But there is more to this principle.

For those who covenant to follow Him, God asks that we return one-tenth of our increase as tithing. Think about that for a moment. He gives us everything, then asks only for one-tenth of our increase in return. If some wealthy benefactor gave us a million dollars on the condition that we would someday return even half of it back to him, we would consider this to be astonishing generosity. By rights God could ask for nine-tenths back and be justified, but instead He asks only for one-tenth as the standard law of financial return. And then, incredibly, if we willingly return that one-tenth, He opens the "windows of heaven" and further blesses us for our obedience (see Malachi 3:8-12).

This is true in other ways as well. God asks for only a small portion or a small investment on our part and returns great blessings when we willingly comply. Here are only a few examples:

- Of the seven days in each week, we are asked to set aside one as His day. That is not even 15 percent of the total.
- In each week of one hundred sixty-eight hours, we are asked to spend only three of those in formal worship services.

We are asked to serve Him in other ways and to always remember Him, but as far as formal worship, He asks less than 2 percent of our total time.

- In a twenty-four-hour day, if we spend only one hour in scripture reading, prayer, and pondering about spiritual things (an investment of less than 5 percent), we will receive enormous spiritual returns. Even half an hour a day brings noticeable and marvelous returns.

- By expending an hour a day just four or five times a week, one can bring his or her body into good physical condition.

- One can plant a single bushel of wheat and reap a hundred or more in return.

The examples of this "tithing principle" go on and on. God does require certain expenditures on our part to get the returns He offers, but usually it is only a fraction of what He could rightly ask of us. Is not this also a great manifestation of His grace and mercy unto us?

There is another aspect of the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ that is closely related to the "tithing principle." While teaching the Zoramites,<sup>4</sup> Amulek said: "Yea, I would that ye would come forth and harden not your hearts any longer; for behold, now is the time and the day of your salvation; and therefore, if ye will repent and harden not your hearts, *immediately* shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you" (Alma 34:31; emphasis added).

We are not sure exactly how long the Zoramites had been in their state of apostasy. The implication seems to be that it had gone on for an extended period of time. It doesn't really matter, for Amulek promised that if they would repent and

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4. A people described as "apostate" who "deny Christ, believe in a false concept of election, and worship with set prayers" (Alma 31, headnote).

soften their hearts, the gospel plan would immediately take effect. "Fairness" might require that an equal number of years be spent in repentance before the blessings be extended.

I learned this while serving as a bishop and working with a man who had been out of the Church for thirty-five years. Sincerely penitent, he wanted to know what he had to do to come back. He was struggling with the idea that God could forgive him after so long and wondered if it was "too late" for him. I tried to teach him this "immediacy principle" in this way. We had talked about the fact that in order to receive a temple recommend again, he would have to be a full-tithe payer. With his help, I calculated that over those thirty-five years away from the Lord, he would have owed about a hundred thousand dollars in back tithing. If compound interest were added, his "bill" could be close to twice that amount.

He was staring at me, not sure if I was serious or not. Then I said to him, "To pay all of your back tithing with interest would be the fair thing to do to make things right. Fortunately for you, and for all of us, the Lord isn't always strictly fair as the world would define fairness. So I'll tell you what. You start now and pay a full and honest tithing. Continue that, along with the other things you are doing, and in a few months you will have paid your debt to the Lord." Even as I said it, I caught myself. "No, that is wrong. You cannot possibly ever pay your debt to the Lord. But as far as your tithing goes, you will have cleared that debt, for He will accept of your offering."

It was a simple and yet wonderful way to illustrate what Amulek seemed to mean when he said, "Immediately shall the great plan of redemption be brought about unto you." That good brother wept that night as he came to understand that it would not take him thirty-five years of righteousness to undo

thirty-five years of error. And I wept as well as the Spirit powerfully reminded me once again of God's infinite love and mercy for His children.

The parable of the prodigal son (see Luke 15:11-32) is a powerful example of this principle. There are so many lessons in that story, but for me, the most powerful is found in a single phrase. When the son finally "came to himself," he decided he would return home and see if his father could forgive him enough to allow him to be one of the domestic servants (see 15:17-18). Even that would have been an act of mercy. In strict fairness, the boy could have—perhaps even should have—been offered nothing. After all, it was his own choice that led him to this woeful state of affairs.

But then comes the powerful lesson: "And he arose, and came to his father. *But when he was yet a great way off*, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him" (Luke 15:20; emphasis added).

How did the father see him while he was yet a great way off? Was it because he was watching for him? Did the father, who had been deeply wronged, make the son come all the way back to where he was and fall down and grovel before him to prove his penitence? Did the father have the boy return the squandered inheritance, or at least work it off as a servant, before he could be restored to his former position in the family? No. While he was yet a great way off, the father saw him, was filled with compassion, and ran to meet his son. In my mind, there is no more beautiful lesson in all of the scriptures about the grace and mercy of God.

Such are the manifestations of the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. Let us not, as Zenock warned, frustrate God by ignoring or forgetting the manifestations of His grace and mercy, which we see and enjoy all around us every day of our lives.

## RECEIVING THE GRACE AND MERCY OF CHRIST IN OUR LIVES

Once we better understand the extent of the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ, the pressing question becomes, "What can I do to receive His grace and let it more fully operate in my life?" Once again, there are probably numerous answers to that question, but I should like to suggest four specific things we can do that will greatly enhance our chances of more fully receiving the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

- "Seek not to counsel the Lord."
- Draw on the power of His grace and mercy.
- Understand the doctrine of grace.
- Always remember Him.

While speaking to his people, the prophet Jacob taught a simple and yet a most profound concept. "Wherefore, brethren, *seek not to counsel the Lord*, but to take counsel from his hand. For behold, ye yourselves know that he counseleth in wisdom, and in justice, and in great mercy, over all his works" (Jacob 4:10; emphasis added).

At first, this appears to be such an obvious concept that it hardly seems worth mentioning, and yet it has been my experience that this is a common failing among us, even among those who are diligently striving to be more like the Master. The following are just a few examples of how we do this:

- We react with anger and frustration when life doesn't come exactly as we like, such as when tragedy strikes or when setbacks occur. Some even turn bitter and reject God when things don't go their way.
- We try to impose our deadlines on the Lord; we tell him when we have to have an answer or when something needs to happen.
- We reject certain calls for service which we view as too

challenging or outside of our comfort zones and then ask for callings more to our liking.

- We sometimes view God as though He were a mail-order catalog. We determine what we need, place our "order" through a few prayers, and then expect immediate delivery.

- We may go for long periods of time totally neglecting spiritual things, and then, when a crisis strikes, we want immediate and complete response from God.

A moment's thought should help us clearly see the utter foolishness of such thinking. God is infinite and perfect in every aspect, every characteristic, every attribute. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly loving and merciful, perfectly just. He understands all aspects of a situation, including our inner thoughts and longings. He knows the future and how things will develop if one choice or another is made. He has all power and can influence events to our favor. On the other hand, man is finite, greatly limited in both knowledge and power. We are ignorant, self-centered, quick to sin, slow to hearken, prone to snap judgments, and imperfect in countless ways. Yet we presume to try and suggest to Him how He should do His work, especially His work in our behalf. This seems to be one of the more damaging forms of pride—we trust in our own abilities more than we trust in God. How limited is our view if we think we know better how to live our lives than He does? Often, His working out of His plan for us brings discomfort. It may even leave us reeling as the inevitable tragedies of life come. But if we can remain humble and trust in Him and seek to accept His counsel, rather than trying to counsel Him, then His purposes can more fully and more quickly be brought about in our behalf.

C. S. Lewis used a powerful analogy to teach us this principle: "Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand

what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace."<sup>5</sup>

Another aspect of refraining from counseling the Lord is important. Alma makes a rather remarkable statement after his reunion with the four sons of Mosiah. He longs to have the voice of an angel and declare the gospel with the voice of a trump. But then he immediately says, "But behold, I am a man, and I do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me" (Alma 29:3). That is a marvelous example of someone who is striving to avoid counseling the Lord. Accepting what the Lord allots to us in life is part of the idea of not trying to tell the Lord how to conduct His work. But what follows Alma's personal commitment provides another great insight into how God works with us: "I know that [God] granteth unto men *according to their desire*, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I know that he alloteth unto men, yea, decreeth unto them decrees which are unalterable, *according to their wills*, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction" (Alma 29:4; emphasis added).

I have always believed that if we desire to do good, God will grant those desires to us. What is startling about Alma's statement is the concept that God will also grant unto us those desires that may lead us to destruction. In other words, the

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5. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 174.

principle of agency is so important that even God in all of His majesty and power will not force us into paths that we do not want to go. With a single word, He could bring the rebellious or the apathetic to their knees and humble them to the point where they begged for mercy. But as Lehi taught, we "are free to choose liberty and eternal life, . . . or to choose captivity and death" (2 Nephi 2:27).

Elder Erastus Snow, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve in the early history of the Church, taught a similar principle when he said: "If our spirits are inclined to be stiff and refractory, and *we desire continually the gratification of our own will* to the extent that this feeling prevails in us, the Spirit of the Lord is held at a distance from us; or, *in other words, the Father withholds his Spirit from us in proportion as we desire the gratification of our own will*. We interpose a barrier between us and our Father, that he cannot, consistently with himself, move upon us so as to control our actions."<sup>6</sup>

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Savior set the perfect example in this regard. Just moments away from suffering so intensely that He would bleed at every pore and just hours away from a horrible execution, He cried out from the depths of His soul, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matthew 26:39). The Savior certainly dreaded what lay before Him and longed to escape it. But, oh, how important is that one single word that came next, "nevertheless." Even though He expressed His desires to the Father, He immediately added that profoundly important phrase "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Even as His desires almost overwhelmed Him, He put His will in submission to the Father's. This is the perfect model for us. It is all right for us to go to the Lord and

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6. Erastus Snow, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-86), 7:352; emphasis added.

express with all the yearnings of our soul those things we desire as long as we can also say in our hearts, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Our goal is to have His will be done on earth just as it is in heaven (see Matthew 6:10).

A rich definition of *grace* is found in the Bible Dictionary included in the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version of the Bible. Note how the concept of power is included in this definition: "The main idea of the word is *divine means of help or strength*, given through the bounteous mercy and love of Jesus Christ. . . . It is likewise through the grace of the Lord that individuals, through faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ and repentance of their sins, *receive strength and assistance* to do good works that they otherwise would not be able to maintain if left to their own means. *This grace is an enabling power* that allows men and women to lay hold on eternal life and exaltation, after they have expended their own best efforts."<sup>7</sup>

By ourselves we are not capable of generating sufficient power to achieve eternal life. This requires divine help, a strengthening power which comes from God. This concept is taught in numerous places in the scriptures,<sup>8</sup> but perhaps it is most clearly taught by Moroni in the book of Ether: "If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them" (Ether 12:27).

As Latter-day Saints, we are taught the importance of

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7. Bible Dictionary, s.v. "grace"; emphasis added.

8. For a few examples, see Isaiah 40:29-30; Romans 8:31-39; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Jacob 4:6-7; Alma 26:12; Moroni 7:33; D&C 1:28; 133:58-59.

self-reliance, and that is an admirable trait. But when it comes to overcoming sin and transgression, the scriptures make it clear that we must rely on more than ourselves. We know that it is possible for Satan to exercise great power over us.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it is foolish to think that we can overcome sin and live a Christlike life on our own strength and power alone. Yet sometimes we hear people say, "I am not worthy to ask God for help. I will change on my own, then I will seek Him."

There is no one more keenly interested in our efforts to change our lives for the better than the Father and the Son, and They have promised to extend Their "enabling power" in our behalf if we will but turn to Them and seek Their power. God's grace—this enabling, strengthening power—is sufficient to turn our weaknesses into strengths. Paul said it all when he said simply, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

Of course we are expected to exercise full diligence in trying to put away sinful behavior, but to think we can do it on our own is to miss the concept of grace. We simply do not have the power in and of ourselves to overcome the chains of hell and the bondage of sin. Elder Hartman Rector Jr. gave a powerful example of this principle some years ago. He told of a man who had been taught for years by stake missionaries. He believed the gospel but was a heavy smoker and had failed again and again to overcome this habit. He wanted to quit, but the habit was too strongly entrenched. The missionaries decided to fast and pray with the man and ask for God's help in the matter. Elder Rector then describes what happened

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9. For example, the Savior said that we can become a "servant of sin" (John 8:34); the Doctrine and Covenants refers to the "bondage of sin" (D&C 84:49-51); Nephi warned that Satan can grasp us in his "awful chains" (2 Nephi 28:22); Alma talked about the "chains of hell" (Alma 12:11); and Amulek taught that if we do not repent, the devil can have "all power" over us (Alma 34:35).

next: "At the completion of the fast, we all met in his home and knelt with him in his living room, each praying in turn. The prayers were essentially the same; they were, that the Lord would take from this brother his desire to smoke. He was the last to pray and then he arose and announced, 'I have no desire to smoke.' He hasn't smoked unto this day. Since that time he has served in the bishopric of his ward and even now is serving in a stake MIA superintendency. He is today a stalwart in the faith, a real servant of the Lord. The Lord literally took from him his weakness and made him a tower of strength instead."<sup>10</sup>

President George Q. Cannon, a member of the First Presidency, taught a similar principle, only he tied it to the gifts of the Spirit: "If any of us are imperfect, it is our duty to pray for the gift that will make us perfect. Have I imperfections? I am full of them. What is my duty? To pray to God to give me the gifts that will correct these imperfections. If I am an angry man, it is my duty to pray for charity, which suffereth long and is kind. Am I an envious man? It is my duty to seek for charity, which envieth not. So with all the gifts of the Gospel. They are intended for this purpose. No man ought to say, 'Oh, I cannot help this; it is my nature.' He is not justified in it, for the reason that God has promised to give strength to correct these things, and to give gifts that will eradicate them."<sup>11</sup> One of the most important practical steps we can take to draw down the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ in our behalf is to strive diligently to draw down the enabling power of God so that we can overcome whatever weaknesses we may have.

There is a principle taught by President Boyd K. Packer

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10. Hartman Rector Jr., Conference Report, April 1970, 140-41.

11. George Q. Cannon, *Millennial Star* 56 (23 April 1894): 260-61.

that illustrates why I would include understanding the doctrine as one of the suggestions for drawing down the power of grace into our lives. He said: "True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. Preoccupation with unworthy behavior can lead to unworthy behavior. That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel."<sup>12</sup> Though this will require a more extensive treatment than the other suggestions, it is my strong belief that correctly understanding the doctrine of grace will help us incorporate that power of grace directly into our lives. This will require that we better understand justice and mercy and how these two concepts interact with one another.

#### THE LAW OF JUSTICE

Justice is an attribute of Deity. As with God's other attributes, justice is found in perfection in God. He is perfectly, absolutely just in every way. We need to keep this in mind as we talk about justice. It is part of God's divine nature. Through Him all things will be kept or made perfectly just. If this were not so, then God would cease to be God (see Alma 42:22).

As a side note, it is interesting how deeply inherent in our natures is this sense of justice, or this sense of right and wrong. Give even a young child a smaller portion of dessert than another, or let one stay up longer at night than another, and you will almost immediately hear the cry, "That's not fair." As another example of this, getting revenge (or justice) is one of the most common themes in literature and the media.

In the theological sense, the Law of Justice (we'll capitalize

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12. Boyd K. Packer, Conference Report, October 1986, 20; or *Ensign*, November 1986, 17.

it to distinguish it from nontheological uses) is quite simple to understand. It has a positive and a negative aspect. It could be simply stated in this way: For every keeping of the law, there must be a reward. For every violation of the law, there must be a punishment. In modern revelation, we are told: "There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated—and when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law" (D&C 130:20–21). That is the positive side. Obedience brings a reward or blessing. There is also a negative aspect of the Law of Justice. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, "Justice demands that a penalty be paid for every violation of the Lord's laws."<sup>13</sup>

If every violation of the law requires a punishment, then it should be clear that there are only two ways to meet the demands of justice or to satisfy its claims upon us. First, we can keep the law perfectly. If we never violate the law, then justice is satisfied. It has no claim on us. When we are brought before it, justice will say, "I am satisfied. I have no claim on this person." If that is not done, however, justice can still be satisfied by paying the penalty when a violation takes place.

#### "AND BY THE LAW NO FLESH IS JUSTIFIED"

This idea of our need to satisfy the demands of justice is a pivotal key in understanding the doctrine of grace and the place of works in our salvation. Note again what Paul taught about this. He said, "*A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law*

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13. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 406.

*shall no flesh be justified* (Galatians 2:16; emphasis added). As noted earlier, this doctrine is also taught in the Book of Mormon. Father Lehi said, "And *by the law no flesh is justified*; or, *by the law men are cut off*" (2 Nephi 2:5; emphasis added).

Leaving mercy or grace out of the equation for a moment, we can clearly see that no person can be justified by the law alone. Why? Because no one lives the law perfectly! Paul summed it up very clearly when he said, "There is none righteous, no, not one. . . . For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10, 23). To satisfy the Law of Justice by our works alone, we would have to live so that there was not even one single violation. Then and only then could the law say, "I have no claim on this person."

One of the ways in which the Book of Mormon clarifies our understanding of the doctrine of grace is in the idea that mercy cannot rob justice (see Alma 42:25). This should be clearer now. God loves us with perfect love and compassion. He is filled with mercy toward us. But He is also perfectly just. If He were to say, "I know that you have sinned, but since I love you, I will overlook it," then it could be rightly said that mercy has robbed justice of her claims on the person; but the scriptures teach us that God cannot look upon sin "with the least degree of allowance" (Alma 45:16; D&C 1:31). If God's mercy were to rob justice (or sidestep any required payment), then "God would cease to be God" (Alma 42:25).

It is clear that we cannot satisfy justice by our works alone. Therefore, some kind of payment must be made. "But," says one, "why can't I pay justice for my transgressions (an idea suggested in D&C 19:15-20) and be square with her?"

#### THE NEED FOR AN INFINITE ATONEMENT

There are two answers to that question. Part of the concept of justice requires that restoration be made for wrong. We can see that in a simple example such as robbery. If I steal a

thousand dollars from someone, it is not enough that I feel sorry for my crime or even spend some time in jail. To bring about full restoration, the wronged person needs to get the thousand dollars back.

Herein lies a great problem. Most of the things we do in violation of God's laws have consequences and effects which are beyond our capacity to fix or to make full restitution for. How does a young man who seduces a girl and robs her of her chastity restore that to her? When a drunk driver runs a stop sign and kills a young father and mother, how does he possibly restore them to their former condition? How does a man undo the psychological and spiritual damage of an unrestrained and foul temper? When we violate the laws of God, we unleash forces and effects that are beyond our ability to undo. We affect lives, damage minds and personalities, influence whole generations, and deprive people of opportunities that are lost forever. The consequences of our actions become infinite and no one is capable of making those things right (or satisfying justice) on their own. This is why Amulek taught that "there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world" (Alma 34:12).

That is only the first reason why man cannot satisfy justice on his own. There is another consequence of sin. When we violate the law of God, we not only put ourselves in debt to justice, but we become unclean in God's sight. He is a perfectly holy and righteous being. There is no shadow of sin or imperfection in Him. And the scriptures make it clear that no unclean thing can dwell in His presence. "And he doth not dwell in unholy temples; neither can filthiness or anything which is unclean be received into the kingdom of God" (Alma 7:21; see also 1 Nephi 10:21; Moses 6:57).

Here again we see the need for an infinite atonement. No one is capable of making this full restitution or becoming holy

and clean by his or her own efforts. This is why Paul taught so forcefully that no man is justified by the law or by his own works. It simply is not possible because (1) no one is capable of keeping the law perfectly and therefore all are in debt to justice; (2) no one can perfectly undo the effects created by sin and transgression; and (3) sin makes us unclean and therefore unworthy to dwell in the presence of God.

Repentance alone does nothing to correct this inescapable dilemma. In one sense, repentance is not forward progress at all but only a return to where we should have been from the beginning.<sup>14</sup> When we stop sinning (or repent), this only means we once again start doing what we should have been doing all along. In and of itself, repentance cannot undo the dilemma we have created for ourselves.

#### THE PLAN OF MERCY

If the Law of Justice were all that there was to contend with, man's fate would be grim indeed. Fortunately, our Heavenly Father is not only perfectly just, but He is perfectly loving and merciful. Because of that perfect love, He established a plan whereby His children could be free to choose for themselves, and, even though they would make mistakes, still have a way for justice to be satisfied so they could return to live with Him. The scriptures refer to this plan by various names, including the plan of salvation (see Alma 42:5; Moses 6:62); the plan of happiness (see Alma 42:8, 16); and the plan of redemption (see Alma 34:31).

It is this last title that best describes how justice is satisfied even though all men sin and come short of God's glory. The

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14. At this point, we are speaking as though there were no plan of redemption and no atoning sacrifice. We are, as Alma puts it, "laying it aside" (Alma 42:11), in order to make an important point. When we turn to a discussion of the mercy and love of God, we shall see that repentance is a critical part of that plan.

key to the plan of redemption was a Redeemer. This, of course, was Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten of the Father, chosen before the foundation of the world (see Moses 4:1-4; Abraham 3:27). To better understand how the plan of redemption works, let us look for a moment at the nature of the Redeemer to see what it was about Him that made it possible to redeem mankind from this great dilemma.

We know and believe that of all the children of Adam and Eve who ever have or ever will come to earth, the Savior was unique in a marvelous way. Like all the rest of us, He was born of a mortal mother. Through Mary, Jesus inherited all of the conditions of mortality: He was subject to pain, temptation, and death. But unlike all the rest of us, He did not have a mortal father. His Father was Elohim, and thus Jesus had powers and qualities He would not otherwise have gotten if Joseph had been His father. He was subject to death, but He had power over death. He was subject to pain, but He could endure an infinite amount of pain and not die because of His power over death. He was subject to temptation, but He never once gave in to that temptation. He lived a life of absolute perfection, never once violating the Father's laws—not in thought, not in word, not in action.

#### CHRIST AND THE LAW OF JUSTICE

This unique combination of the mortal and the divine put Christ in a unique relationship with justice. As we said before, there are only two ways to satisfy justice. The first is to keep the law perfectly. This Jesus did. When He stood before justice, justice had no claim on Him! Or to put it in the language of Paul, Jesus Christ was the only person in all of human history who was justified by His works. He was the only person in all of human history who never became unclean and who could, therefore, return to the Father on His own merits.

The second way to satisfy justice is by making payment

for transgression. Here again, our Redeemer played a critical role. He had no debt to the Law of Justice. He was perfectly justified by the way He lived and could say to the Law of Justice, "You have no claim on me," but he did something more. He went before the law and said in essence, "I owe you no debt, no payment of any kind. However, I am willing to suffer the penalty for all the sins and transgressions committed by others as though I were guilty of them all. I will pay the price through enduring an infinite amount of suffering in behalf of mankind."

Any mortal man would have died under suffering so intense that it caused Him to bleed at every pore (see Mosiah 3:7). We cannot begin to fathom such suffering or fully understand the price that was paid. Suffice it to say, as Amulek suggested, that it was an infinite sacrifice.

With that terrible price paid, Jesus could say to justice, "I have paid the price you demand and can therefore satisfy your claims for every living soul on the earth." In other words, putting it in Book of Mormon terminology, Christ's mercy did not rob justice, but rather it paid her. Note how clearly this is taught in the Book of Mormon. "*And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice, therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption*" (Alma 34:16; emphasis added).<sup>15</sup>

In the scriptures, Christ is called our advocate. In the legal profession, an advocate is an attorney, generally what those in America would call a defense attorney, because he or she becomes the person who "advocates" or speaks in behalf of the

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15. This is clearly taught in several other places in the Book of Mormon (see Mosiah 15:9 as an example).

client. This imagery of the advocate pleading in behalf of an accused person is used by the Savior Himself and beautifully teaches how the Atonement brought about the plan of mercy. Usually, an advocate defends a client by pleading that the client is not guilty. In this example, it is a very different plea:

Listen to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him—

Saying: Father, behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin [He is not referring to us here], in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed for the sins of the world, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified;

Wherefore, Father [because of Christ's perfect life, because of His perfect works], spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life (D&C 45:3-5).

#### THE CONDITIONAL ASPECTS OF GRACE

Once we understand the doctrine of justice and mercy, it is clear that we are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ and not in any way by our own efforts or merit. It is a grave error to somehow think that we can live worthy enough to earn salvation; however, to think that this marvelous gift is offered without condition, or only on the condition of saying, "I accept Jesus Christ as my personal Savior," is also to make a doctrinal error of grave proportions.

Back in my missionary days, I grew frustrated when I was confronted by evangelical Christians with their interpretation of Paul's teachings. Now if someone asked, "Do you believe in salvation by grace and not by works as taught by the Apostle Paul?" my answer would be without hesitation or equivocation, "Absolutely!" But I would also add this: "However, the scriptures, including the writings of Paul himself, clearly teach

that there are conditions we must meet if the fullness of Christ's grace is to be extended to us."

We all recognize that there are some aspects of grace which are extended to man unconditionally. The results of the fall of Adam are atoned for unconditionally. All who come to earth will be resurrected without respect to how they lived. The world, which drastically changed when Adam fell, will be restored to its former paradisaical state without any act on our part (see Article of Faith 1:10). Little children are not capable of understanding the consequences of sin, and therefore they are not held accountable for the wrongs they commit before they reach the age of accountability. Their transgressions are automatically atoned for through the grace of Jesus Christ. "The curse of Adam is taken away from them in me [Christ]" (Moroni 8:8), and "all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of God" (D&C 137:10). A similar condition applies to those who die without a knowledge of the law. They are not held to the same conditions as those who know and understand the laws of God and His plan for us (see 2 Nephi 9:26; D&C 137:7-8).

These unconditional aspects of the grace of Christ are marvelous in every way, and we should remember them as we thank God for His great mercies. However, they are only part of the whole picture. There are also critical aspects of the atoning sacrifice which are extended to us only on the condition that we accept and meet certain requirements laid down by the Savior. This is in keeping with justice. He paid the price for our redemption. He has every right to set the conditions on which that price is paid.

Paul would surely be horrified at the thought that his teachings are being used to justify the idea that all a person has to do to achieve salvation is "confess with thy mouth." If

ever there was a prophetic writer who stressed the importance of living a life of good works, it is Paul the Apostle. While it is true that he taught salvation by grace with clarity and power, it is also true that every epistle is filled with a call to righteousness (or good works). Note a very small sampling of his statements in this regard, all of which come from Romans and Galatians, the two books in which Paul makes his strongest defense for salvation by grace:

- "[God] will render to every man according to his deeds. . . .
- "Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;
- "But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile" (Romans 2:6, 9-10).
- "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Romans 2:13).
- "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17).
- "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).
- "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:8).
- "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

The conditions set down by Christ for our redemption are simple and very clear. The scriptures refer to them as "the doctrine of Christ" (2 Nephi 31:21).

Behold, verily, verily, I say unto you, I will declare unto you *my doctrine*.

And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me;

... the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to *repent and believe in me*.

And whoso believeth in me, and is *baptized*, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God. . . .

And whoso believeth in me believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the *Holy Ghost*. . . .

Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them (3 Nephi 11:31-35, 38; emphasis added).

When Nephi outlined the doctrine of Christ, he added one other thing to the list: "Unless a man shall endure to the end, in following the example of the Son of the living God, he cannot be saved" (2 Nephi 31:16; see also 10-21).

There it is. The conditions for having Christ pay the price for our sins are simply these: (1) faith in Jesus Christ; (2) true repentance; (3) baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; (4) receiving the gift of the Holy Ghost; and (5) enduring faithfully to the end. They are simple to explain and easy to understand but require a life of discipleship and obedience, or a life of good works. We stress again that it is a mistake to think that it is the good works which save us. Paul warns us against that doctrinal trap. It is the perfect life and the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ alone that saves us, but a life of righteousness is the condition set by the Savior if we are to have His saving grace extended in our behalf. As Nephi succinctly summed it up: "And he cometh into the world that he may save all men if they will hearken unto his voice" (2 Nephi 9:21; emphasis added).

This balance between the saving grace of Jesus Christ and the necessary requirement of our own efforts is shown beautifully in a passage written by Moroni:

Yea, come unto Christ [the part that is required of us], and be perfected in him [it is through His works, not our own], and deny yourselves of all ungodliness [another condition we must meet]; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength [the ultimate expression of faith], then is his *grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ*; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God [for it is His power, not ours, which saves us].

And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ *by the grace of God*, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot [which makes us clean so that we can once again return to live with God, who is also holy and without spot] (Moroni 10:32-33).

### ALWAYS REMEMBER HIM

Hopefully, it is clear now why understanding the doctrine of grace is one of the most important things we can do to more fully receive God's grace and mercy in our lives. Once we understand the doctrine, it becomes evident that nothing any man could do—no matter how valiantly he strived to live the law—would earn or merit the sacrifice of the life of a perfectly holy being in behalf of sinful, unworthy, and often ungrateful, transgressors. This was an act of infinite grace and mercy.

Each Sunday as we partake of the sacrament, we are asked to join our hearts and minds together as the two sacramental prayers are offered. In those prayers, we renew our covenants with the Lord, and in those prayers the Lord renews a significant promise to us. The promise is that we will always have His Spirit to be with us if we can sincerely witness unto Him

that we are willing to take His name upon us, that we will keep His commandments, and that we will always remember Him (see D&C 20:77). The Lord's promise is repeated in both prayers, but it is interesting that in the prayer on the water, mention is made again of the need to always remember Him (see D&C 20:79).

If we examine the scriptural accounts which refer to the initiation of the sacrament or which give us specific instructions regarding the sacrament, we find the concept of remembrance taught again and again.<sup>16</sup> If we include the changes made in the New Testament by Joseph Smith, the words *remembrance* or *remember* are used a total of eighteen times. Again and again we are enjoined to partake of the sacrament in remembrance of Him and to always remember Him.

This seems like a such a simple thing, and yet if we truly made this a part of our daily lives it would have a profound effect and dramatically change our discipleship. One of the facts of modern life for most of us is that it has become filled with complexity. We live at a hectic, breathtaking pace, racing here and there to meet the demands of an overbooked, over-programmed schedule. Many even need complex calendaring systems to track their numerous activities. How easy it is in that frenetic lifestyle to forget the Savior and God, or at least to push them back to some corner of our minds while we race to fulfill all our commitments.

And yet, think for a moment how profoundly taking time to remember Him would alter our very beings. Recently, I was driving on the freeway between Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah. The traffic was heavy, and construction had restricted

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16. These primary references are found in the Gospels (see Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20), in 3 Nephi (see 3 Nephi 18:1-11, 28-30), and in the revelation on Church organization and government (see D&C 20:75-79).

the number of lanes available. Suddenly, this driver came racing up behind me, weaving in and out of the traffic, moving ten or fifteen miles above the posted limit. As he cut in directly in front of me and I had to brake sharply, I felt a rush of irritation and anger. Then, since I was right in the midst of preparing this paper, I remembered the admonition to always remember Him.

What happened next was a marvelous thing. As I thought of the Savior and how He would respond to this kind of irritation, my anger melted away and I felt a little ashamed. "I don't have to be first or faster than everyone else," came the thought. "This man did not damage me in any serious way. He too is a child of God, perhaps even a good member of the Church who is caught up in the rush of life just as you are. Besides that, you have done exactly the same thing to others in your own past driving experience." The change in my feelings and attitudes was remarkable. The impatience and irritation and anger melted away. The little flash of road rage I had experienced was gone, and I drove on in peace and patience for the remainder of the trip. All of this change came about simply because I had brought the Savior back to my remembrance as I covenant each Sunday that I will do.

How would this simple act of remembrance change how we respond to a boss who exercises unrighteous dominion? A neighbor who has no concern for your property? A friend who betrays us? A rebellious child? A less-than-perfect spouse?

King Benjamin taught that we are "unprofitable servants," even when we serve God diligently (Mosiah 2:21). If profit is defined as something which increases the goods, financial resources, or services of another, then it should be clear that nothing we can do could ever bring a "profit" to God. He has everything and is already perfect in every way. So what can

we offer to God that would show our gratitude for the grace and mercy extended to us?

Some time ago there was an interesting article about mountain climbing in a medical magazine. It had nothing to do with religion and was not written by a Latter-day Saint, and yet it contained a story that offers a wonderful answer to the question, "What can we as unprofitable servants ever do to repay Christ for what He has done for us?"

The article was about a man named Czenkusch who runs a climbing school in Colorado. This school caters to many physicians who want to learn how to climb (thus the article's inclusion in a medical magazine). Czenkusch was describing to the interviewer the belay system in mountain climbing. This is the system by which climbers protect themselves from falls. One climber gets in a safe position and secures the rope for the other climber, usually around his or her own body. "You're on belay," means, "I've got you. If something happens, I will stop you from falling." It is an important part of mountain climbing. Now note what followed next in the article: "Belaying has brought Czenkusch his best and worst moments in climbing. Czenkusch once fell from a high precipice, yanking out three mechanical supports and pulling his belayer off a ledge. He was stopped, upside down, 10 feet from the ground when his spread-eagled belayer arrested the fall with the strength of his outstretched arms. 'Don saved my life,' says Czenkusch. 'How do you respond to a guy like that? Give him a used climbing rope for a Christmas present? No, *you remember him. You always remember him.*'"<sup>17</sup>

And so it is with us and the Savior. How could we ever possibly repay Him for saving us from our own fall and the

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17. Eric G. Anderson, "The Vertical Wilderness," *Private Practice*, November 1979, 21; emphasis added.

specter of spiritual death? What finite effort or gift of ours could every repay this infinite and divine gift? The answer is given by the Savior Himself: "Witness unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you" (3 Nephi 18:11).

That brings to mind once again Zenock's warning in the Book of Mormon: "Thou art angry, O Lord, with this people, because they will not understand [and remember] thy mercies which thou hast bestowed upon them because of thy Son" (Alma 33:16).

### CONCLUSION

Some time ago, a writer for one of the media outlets of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints asked me this question: "In a sentence or two, what would you say is the most important thing you have learned about Jesus Christ in your lifetime?"

I answered without hesitation. "I have always believed that Jesus Christ loves me. But in recent years, I have come to sense far more powerfully just how infinite, eternal, long-suffering, and ever-present that love is. I am only beginning to fathom what His love and the love of the Father could mean to me if I will but fully turn to Them and allow Them to bless my life."

Even now as I write those words, they seem so terribly inadequate in expressing what I feel about the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. Therefore, I shall close with Their own promise, which I believe in fully, though I cannot possibly yet understand all that it entails:

"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).