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My dear brothers and sisters, I am grateful for this opportunity to speak to men and women who have been appointed to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the young people in our high schools, colleges, and universities. Yours is a sacred responsibility. You are custodians of truth and recipients of the trust of your students. They look to you as persons entrusted with a sacred curriculum. Your task is holy and your performance is therefore the subject of high expectations. Your teachings are, potentially, the most important your students will receive. All of us who have been called or appointed as teachers of religion have the sobering and sacred responsibility of trying to make ourselves and our performance worthy of the great message we bear. May God bless us as we strive to do so!

After Enos cried to the Lord in mighty prayer all day and into the night, a voice came to him saying: “Enos, thy sins are forgiven thee, and thou shalt be blessed” (Enos 1:5). Knowing that God could not lie, Enos understood that his guilt was swept away. Then, he asked the question that provides the text for my remarks: “Lord, how is it done?” (v. 7).

It was done because of the Atonement and his faith in the Redeemer who paid the price (see v. 8). By an atonement that is both miraculous and beyond our comprehension, the vicarious sacrifice of the Lamb without blemish satisfies the justice of God. In this manner, we receive the mercy of God.

But what is justice? And what is mercy? And how do they relate to one another? These concepts are central to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are sometimes misunderstood because they are easily confused with comparable concepts we understand from our mortal preoccupation with what we call the criminal law. Indeed, our ideas about justice and mercy and the laws of God are sometimes shaped and confused by what we know about criminal justice as specified by the laws of man.

The young people you teach are susceptible to these misunderstandings. I have therefore chosen to speak about justice and mercy and the Atonement, and about repentance, confession, and suffering. I will compare and contrast how these realities relate to the content and enforcement of the laws of God and the laws of man. I hope you will help your students understand these important subjects and apply them in their own lives.

JUSTICE AND MERCY AND THE ATONEMENT

Justice has many meanings. One is balance. A popular symbol of justice is scales in balance. Thus, when the laws of man have been violated, justice usually requires that a punishment be imposed, a penalty that will restore the balance.

People generally feel that justice has been done when an offender receives what he deserves — when the punishment fits the crime. Our church’s declaration of belief states that “the commission of crime should be punished [under the laws of man] according to the nature of the offense” (D&C 134:8). The paramount concern of human law is justice.

Unlike the changeable laws of man, the laws of God are fixed and permanent, “irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world” (D&C 130:20).

These laws of God are likewise concerned with justice. The idea of justice as what one deserves is the fundamental premise of all scriptures that speak of men’s being judged according to their works. Alma declared that is was “requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works” (Alma 41:3). The Savior told the Nephites that all men would stand before him to be “judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil” (3 Ne 27:14). In his letter to the Romans, Paul described “the righteous judgment of God” in terms of “rendering to every man according to his deeds” (Rom 2:5–6).

According to eternal law, the consequences that follow from the justice of God are severe and permanent. When a commandment is broken, a commensurate penalty is imposed. This happens automatically. Punishments prescribed by the laws of man only follow the judge’s action, but under the laws of God the consequences and penalties of sin are inherent in the act. “There is a law given, and a punishment affixed,” the prophet Alma taught, and “justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment” (Alma 42:22). “And thus we see,” Alma explained, “that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence” (v. 14). Abinadi taught that the Lord himself “cannot deny justice when it has its claim” (Mosi 15:27). By itself, justice is uncompromising.

The justice of God holds each of us responsible for our own transgressions and automatically imposes the penalty. This reality should permeate our understanding, and it should influence all our teachings about the commandments of God and the effect of individual transgressions.

In keeping with the legal traditions of man, many seem to want justice. It is true that justice is a friend that will protect us from persecution by the enemies of righteousness. But justice will also see that we receive what we deserve, and that is an outcome, I fear. I cannot achieve my eternal goals on the basis of what I deserve. Though I try with all my might, I am still what King Benjamin called an “unprofitable servant” (see Mosi 2:21). To achieve my eternal goals, I need more than I deserve. I need more than justice.

This realization reminds me of an event that occurred in the law firm where I began practicing law almost thirty-five years ago. A Chicago politician had been indicted for stuffing ballot boxes. A partner in our firm told me how this politician came to his office to ask us to represent him in his criminal trial.

“What can you do for me?” he asked. Our partner replied that if this client retained our firm to conduct his defense, we would investigate the facts, research the law, and present the defense at the trial. “In this way,” the lawyer concluded, “we will get you a fair trial.”

The politician promptly stood up, put on his hat, and stalked out of the office. Pursuing him down the hall, the lawyer asked what he had said to offend him. “Nothing.” “Then why are you leaving?” he asked. “The odds aren’t good enough,” the politician replied.
That man would not retain our firm to represent him in court because we would only promise him a fair trial, and he knew he needed more than that. He knew he was guilty, and he could only be saved from prison by something more favorable to him than justice.

Can justice save us? Can man in and of himself overcome the spiritual death all mankind suffers from the Fall, which we bring upon ourselves anew by our own sinful acts? No! Can we “work out our own salvation?” Never, worlds without end! “By the law no flesh is justified,” Lehi explained (2 Ne 2:5). “Salvation doth not come by the law alone,” Abinadi warned (Mosi 13:28). Shakespeare had one of his characters declare this truth: “In the course of justice, none of us should see salvation: we do pray for mercy” (The Merchant of Venice, act 4, sc. 1, lines 199–200).

We know from numerous scriptures that “no unclean thing” can enter the kingdom of God (Moses 6:57; 1 Ne 10:21; [1 Ne 15:34]; Alma 40:26). If we are to return to the presence of our Heavenly Father, we need the intervention of some powerful influence that transcends justice. That powerful intervention is the atonement of Jesus Christ.

The good news of the gospel is that because of the atonement of Jesus Christ there is something called mercy. Mercy signifies an advantage greater than is deserved. This could come by the withholding of a deserved punishment or by the granting of an undeserved benefit.

If justice is balance, then mercy is counterbalance. If justice is exactly what one deserves, then mercy is more benefit than one deserves. In its relationship to justice and mercy, the Atonement is the means by which justice is served and mercy is extended. In combination, justice and mercy and the Atonement constitute the glorious eternal wholeness of the justice and mercy of God.

Mercy has several different manifestations in connection with our redemption. The universal resurrection from physical death is an unconditional act of mercy made possible by the Atonement. Alma taught Corianton that “mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead” (Alma 42:23).

A second effect of the Atonement concerns our redemption from spiritual death. We are redeemed from the fall of Adam without condition. We are redeemed from the effects of our personal sins on condition of our obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.

Justice is served and mercy is extended by the suffering and shed blood of Jesus Christ. The Messiah “offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law” (2 Ne 2:7; see also Rom 5:18–19). In this way “God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15).

We are all dependent upon the mercy God the Father extended to all mankind through the atoning sacrifice of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is the central reality of the gospel. This is why we “talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ … that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Ne 25:26). The reality of our total dependence upon Jesus Christ for the attainment of our goals of immortality and eternal life should dominate every teaching and every testimony and every action of every soul touched by the light of the restored gospel. If we teach every other subject and principle with perfection and fall short on this one, we have failed in our most important mission.

LAWS OF MAN AND LAWS OF GOD

Now I come to my comparison of the laws of God and the laws of man. Here I will use the white board for our television audience, and invite those of you here in the Assembly Hall who cannot see the board to refer to the handout we have distributed (also printed at the end of this talk).

The laws of God achieve their purposes through justice, mercy, and the atonement of Jesus Christ. In contrast, the laws of man focus on justice; they have no theory of mercy, and they take no account of the Atonement. This contrast fosters the confusion I mentioned at the outset.

I will now proceed to consider the contrasting positions of the laws of man and the laws of God on some related subjects, such as repentance, confession, and suffering.

The Requirements of Repentance

1. Necessity. The benefits of the Atonement are subject to the conditions prescribed by him who paid the price. The conditions include repentance. The requirement of repentance is one of the principal contrasts between the laws of God and the laws of man.

God has told us through his prophets that only those who repent are forgiven (see D&C 1:32; 58:42). Elder Bruce R. McConkie said it tersely: The Messiah brought “mercy to the repentant and justice to the unrepentant” (The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978], p. 337). Alma taught that “the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state” (Alma 42:13. Amulek said that “he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice” (Alma 34:16). Finally, in this dispensation our Redeemer declared, “If they would not repent they must suffer even as I” (D&C 19:17).

These eternal truths, fundamental in the doctrine of the restored gospel, explain why our church discipline is concerned with assisting a transgressor to repent. These truths also explain why evidence of repentance is the most important single factor in determining what church discipline is necessary to accomplish its principal purpose — to save the soul of the transgressor.

The redemptive function of church discipline and the revelation necessary for its implementation have no counterpart in the laws of man.

2. Confession. A second contrast concerns the role of the criminal’s or the transgressor’s confession.

Under the laws of man, a confession only serves the function of strong evidence of guilt. It is not essential because an accused person can be found guilty without a confession if the other evidence of guilt is sufficient.

Under the laws of God, a confession is absolutely essential because there is no repentance without confession. We read in 1 John, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:9). And in modern revelation the Lord declared, “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins — behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:43; see also 61:2; 64:7).
Repentance begins when we recognize that we have done wrong. We might call this “confession to self.” This occurs, President Spencer W. Kimball said, when a person is willing “to convict himself of the transgression without soft-pedaling or minimizing the error, to be willing to face facts, meet the issue, and pay necessary penalties — and until the person is in this frame of mind he has not begun to repent” (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, ed. Edward L. Kimball [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982], p. 86). The next step, for all our sins, is to confess them to the Lord in prayer.

In addition, when the sins are of a serious nature, they must be confessed to the priesthood leader designated by the Lord — the bishop or branch president or stake president. Elder Marion G. Romney described the sins that must be confessed to the bishop as those transgressions “of such a nature as would, unrepented of, put in jeopardy his right to membership or fellowship in the Church of Jesus Christ” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1955, p. 125). These last two confessions are what the Lord prescribed when he referred to “confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord” (D&C 59:12).

3. Restitution. A third contrast concerns restitution. Restitution is also an essential ingredient of repentance. Transgressors must do all they can to restore what their transgression has taken from others. This includes confession to and seeking the forgiveness of those they have wronged. It also includes making the disclosures necessary to protect those who have been put in jeopardy by their wrongdoing. For example, they may need to alert other persons to health or safety hazards the wrongdoer’s actions have created. As part of restitution, transgressors may also need to make disclosures to civil authorities and to accept the consequences.

Transgressors should look on the necessity for restitution — restoring what they have taken from others — as a privilege. Where restitution can be made, repentance is easier. Where the transgression is such that restitution is very difficult or even impossible, then repentance is also very difficult or even impossible. For example, the most serious sins include murder, adultery, and fornication. It is no coincidence that these are transgressions for which restitution has taken from others. The transgressors must confess to seeking forgiveness of those they have wronged. It also includes making the disclosures necessary to protect those who have been put in jeopardy by their wrongdoing. For example, they may need to alert other persons to health or safety hazards the wrongdoer’s actions have created. As part of restitution, transgressors may also need to make disclosures to civil authorities and to accept the consequences.

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4. Suffering. The fourth contrast, suffering, is probably the most misunderstood ingredient of repentance. This misunderstanding may result from the fact that there is a great gulf between the simple role of suffering under the laws of man and its very complex role under the laws of God.

The laws of man deliberately inflict punishment to make a criminal suffer for his crime. Punishment is a principal object of the laws of man. Criminal courts seek to make an offender “pay” for his wrongdoing, and this is done without regard to whether the offender is repentant or unrepentant.

Some have look on church discipline in the same light. But the suggestion that a Church officer or a disciplinary council is supposed to punish a transgressor or make him suffer to pay for his wrongdoing misunderstands the purpose of church discipline and its relationship (and the relationship of suffering) to repentance, mercy, and the Atonement.

Unrepentant Transgressor. Under the law and justice of God, sinners are punished. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said he would “punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity” (Isa 26:21). Alma taught that God’s law could not exist “save there was a punishment,” and that there is “a punishment affixed” for every sin (Alma 42:17–18; see also Amos 3:1–2). Our second article of faith states our basic belief that men will be punished for their own sins.

Justice requires that the unrepentant transgressor suffer for his own sins. Perhaps the greatest statement of this principle in all the scriptures is the revelation the Lord gave to the Prophet Joseph Smith in March 1830, the month the Book of Mormon was published and the month before the Church was organized (see D&C 19). There the Lord reminded us of “the great day of judgment” when all will be judged according to their works. He explained that the “endless” or “eternal torment” or “punishment” that comes from sin is not punishment without end, but it is the punishment of God, who is endless and eternal (see vv. 3, 6, 10–12).

In this setting, the Savior of the world commanded us to repent and keep his commandments. “Repent,” he commanded, “lest … your sufferings be sore — how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.

“For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

“But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I” (vs. 15–17).

Repentant transgressors. What about repentant transgressors? Are they punished? Must they suffer? The punishment that leads to repentance and the punishment that makes repentance possible must include suffering, but whose suffering is this — the sinner’s or the Savior’s?

Let us recall two scriptures: (1) Alma’s statement that “repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment” (Alma 42:16) and (2) the Savior’s revelation that he had “suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I” (D&C 19:16–17).

Do these scriptures mean that a person who repents does not need to suffer at all because the entire punishment is borne by the Savior? That cannot be the meaning because it would be inconsistent with the Savior’s other teachings.

What is meant is that the person who repents does not need to suffer “even as” the Savior suffered for that sin. Sinners who are repenting will experience some suffering, but, because of their repentance and because of the Atonement, they will not experience the full “exquisite” extent of eternal torment the Savior suffered for that sin.

President Spencer W. Kimball, who gave such comprehensive teachings on repentance and forgiveness, said that personal suffering “is a very important part of repentance. One has not begun to repent...
until he has suffered intensely for his sins” (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p. 88).

“If a person hasn’t suffered, he hasn’t repented... He has got to go through a change in his system whereby he suffers and then forgiveness is a possibility” (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p. 99).

Lehi taught this principle when he said that he Savior’s atoning sacrifice was for “all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered” (2 Ne 2:7). The repentant sinner who comes to Christ with a broken heart and a contrite spirit has been through a process of personal pain and suffering for sin. He understands the meaning of Alma’s statement that “none but the truly penitent are saved” (Alma 42:24).

Bruce C. Hafen has described how some people think that repentance is too easy. He said they look “for short cuts and easy answers, thinking that quick confessions or breezy apologies alone are enough” (The Broken Heart: Applying the Atonement to Life’s Experiences, p. 150). President Kimball said, “Very frequently people think they have repented and are worthy of forgiveness when all they have done is to express sorrow or regret at the unfortunate happening” (Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p. 87).

There is a big difference between the “godly sorrow [that] worketh repentance” (2 Cor 7:10), which involves personal suffering, and the easy and relatively painless sorrow for being caught, or the misplaced sorrow Mormon described as “the sorrowing of the damned, because the Lord would not always suffer them to take happiness in sin” (Morm 2:13).

Alma the Younger certainly understood that easy and painless sorrow was not a sufficient basis for repentance. His experience, related in detail in the Book of Mormon, is our best scriptural illustration of the fact that the process of repentance is filled with personal suffering for sin.

Alma said that after he was stopped in his wicked course, he was “in the darkest abyss” (Mosi 27:29), “racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins.”

“Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell” (Alma 36:12-13).

He told how “the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror” (v. 14). He spoke of being “harrowed up by the memory of [his] many sins” (v. 17). After three days and three nights of what he called “the most bitter pain and anguish of soul,” he cried out to the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, and he received “a remission of [his] sins” (Alma 38:8).

All of our experience confirms the fact that we must endure personal suffering in the process of repentance — and for serious transgressions that suffering can be severe and prolonged. I believe that every one of us who is truly honest with himself or herself recognizes the truth of this principle. We have felt it in our own lives, and we have seen it in the lives of others.

We should also observe that our personal suffering for sin is private, not public. Often only the sinner and the Lord and the Lord’s servant know what is happening. In contrast to the public nature of the punishment inflicted by the laws of man, the suffering that leads to mercy under the laws of God is intensely personal.

The Savior. What about the suffering of the Savior? The laws of man obviously take no account of this.

Under the laws of God, the Savior’s suffering for sin is of supreme importance. The suffering that impels a transgressor toward repentance is his or her own suffering. But the suffering that satisfies the demands of justice for all repented transgressions is the suffering of our Savior and Redeemer. He suffered for the sins of all, “that they might not suffer if they would repent” (D&C 19:16). In the great words of Isaiah, “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5). If we will only repent, the Redeemer’s suffering has paid the price for our sins.

The Savior’s suffering is vastly different from every other suffering for sin. The suffering of the sinner is the suffering of the guilty. The suffering of the Savior was the suffering of the pure and sinless. His suffering was entirely undeserved. He was “wounded for our transgressions,” not his own. As the prophet Amulek explained, nothing short of “an infinite atonement” would suffice for the sins of the world (see Alma 34:12). And, as the Apostle Peter said, the blood that was shed and the sacrifice that was made to redeem us had to be “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet 1:19).

To summarize, the Atonement has no counterpart in the laws of man, and the laws of man take no account of the various elements of repentance and the different kinds of suffering that are accounted under the laws of God.

In contrast to the punishment that is the intended result of the judgment of a criminal court, the primary purpose of church discipline is to facilitate repentance — to qualify a transgressor for the mercy of God and the salvation made possible through the atonement of Jesus Christ. Personal suffering is inevitably part of that process, but personal suffering is not its purpose.

Church discipline is not an instrument of punishment, but a catalyst for change. The purpose of the personal suffering that must occur as part of the process of repentance is not to punish the transgressor, but to change him. The broken heart and contrite spirit required to “answer the ends of the law” (2 Ne 2:7) introduce the repentant transgressor to the change necessary to conform his life to the pattern prescribed by his Redeemer. The major concern of the laws of God is to perfect the lives of his children.

Like wayward Corianton, some transgressors have difficulty understanding “the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner” (Alma 42:1). And they do not understand the conditions of mercy. “Why must I suffer at all?” they ask. “Now that I have said I am sorry, why can’t you just give me mercy and forget about this?” Such questions have some force under the laws of man. Under those laws, mercy can rob justice (as happens in the case of a pardon or executive clemency).

In contrast, under the laws of God mercy cannot rob justice. The sinner must repent or he must pay the full penalty of suffering for his own sins. The object of God’s laws is to save the sinner, not simply to punish him. Consequently, there is no exemption from the conditions a transgressor must meet to qualify for the mercy necessary for salvation. The repentant transgressor must be changed, and the conditions of repentance, including confession and personal suffering, are essential to accomplish that change. To exempt a
transgressor from those conditions would deprive him of the change necessary for his salvation. That would be neither just nor merciful.

Change of Life

The final contrast between the laws of God and the laws of man concerns their different level of concern with a change of life.

We tend to think of the results of repentance as simply cleansing us from sin. That is an incomplete view of the matter. A person who sins is like a tree that bends easily in the wind. On a windy and rainy day the tree may bend so deeply against the ground that the leaves become soiled with mud, like sin. If we only focus on cleaning the leaves, the weakness in the tree that allowed it to bend and soil its leaves may remain. Merely cleansing the leaves does not strengthen the tree. Similarly, a person who is merely sorry to be soiled by sin will sin again in the next high wind. The susceptibility to repetition will continue until the tree has been strengthened.

When a person has gone through the process that results in what the scriptures call a broken heart and a contrite spirit, the Savior does more than cleanse that person from sin. He also gives him or her new strength. The new strength we receive from the Savior is essential for us to realize the purpose of our cleansing from sin, which is to return to our Heavenly Father. To be admitted to his presence, we must be more than clean. We must also be changed from a morally weak person who has transgressed into a strong person with the spiritual stature to dwell in the presence of God. We must, as the scripture says, “[become] a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosi 3:19). This is what the scripture means in its explanation that a person who has repented of sins will forsake them (see D&C 58:43). Forsaking sins is more than resolving not to repeat them. Forsaking involves a fundamental change in the individual.

King Benjamin and Alma both spoke of “a might change of heart.” King Benjamin’s congregation described that might change by saying that they had “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosi 5:2). Alma illustrated that change of heart when he described a people who “awoke unto god,” “put their trust in [him],” and were “faithful until the end” (Alma 5:7, 13). He challenged others to “look forward with an eye of faith” to the time when we will “stand before God to be judged” according to our deeds (v. 15). Persons who have had that change in their hearts have attained the strength and stature to dwell with God. That is what we call being saved.

Before I conclude, I wish to discuss two related subjects of special interest to young people, and therefore of vital importance to the men and women who teach them.

AVOID SIN

Some Latter-day Saints who wrongly think repentance is easy maintain that a little sinning will not hurt. Young people of this persuasion may say, “It is okay to have a few free ones, because it is easy to repent before your mission or marriage.” The adult versions are more sophisticated and more pernicious. Perhaps some would even assert that a person is better off after he has sinned and repented. “Get a little experience with sin,” one argument goes, “and then you will be better able to counsel and sympathize with sinners. You can always repent.”

I plead with my brothers and sisters, my young friends and my older friends, avoid transgression! The idea that one can deliberately sin and easily repent or that one is better off after sinning and repenting are devilish lies of the adversary. Would anyone seriously contend that it is better to learn firsthand that a certain blow will break a bone or that a certain mixture of chemicals will explode and burn off our skin? Are we better off after we have sustained and then scarred over from such injuries? It is obviously better to heed the warnings of wise persons who know the effects of certain traumas on our bodies.

Just as we can benefit from somebody else’s experience in matters such as these, we can also benefit from the warnings contained in the commandments of God. We do not have to have personal experience with the effects of serious transgressions to know that they are injurious to our souls and destructive of our eternal welfare.

Some years ago one of our sons asked me why it was not a good idea to try alcohol and tobacco to see what they were like. He knew about the Word of Wisdom and he also knew the health effects of these substances, but he was questioning why he should not just try them out for himself. I replied that if he wanted to try something out he ought to go to a barnyard and eat a little manure. He recoiled in horror. “Ooh, that’s gross,” he reacted.

“I’m glad you think so,” I said, “but why don’t you just try it out so you will know for yourself? While you are proposing to try one thing that you know is not good for you, why don’t you apply that principle to some others?” That illustration of the silliness of “trying it out for yourself” proved persuasive to one sixteen-year-old.

HOPE VERSUS DISCOURAGEMENT

I spoke earlier of persons who think that repentance is too easy. There are many such among the young. At the opposite extreme are those who think that repentance is too hard. Our youth include many of these also. This group of souls are so tender-hearted and conscientious that they see sin everywhere in their own lives, and they despair of ever being able to be clean. A call for repentance that is clear enough and loud enough to encourage reformation by the lenient can produce paralyzing discouragement in the conscientious. The dose of doctrine that is strong enough to penetrate the hard shell of the easygoing group may prove to be a massive overdose for the conscientious. This is a common problem. Teachers address a diverse audience each time they speak, and we are never free from the reality that a doctrinal underdose for some is an overdose for others.

As teachers of youth, we must make a special effort to counteract the discouragement and despair that Satan uses so skillfully to overpower the struggling. President Ezra Taft Benson gave inspired counsel on this subject. Writing in the Ensign in the first year of his presidency, under the title “Do Not Despair,” he said:

“We live in an age when, as the Lord foretold, men’s hearts are failing them, not only physically but in spirit. (D&C 45:26). Many are giving up heart for the battle of life. Suicide ranks as a major cause of deaths of college students. As the show-down between good and evil approaches with its accompanying trials and tribulations, Satan is increasingly striving to overcome the Saints with despair, discouragement, despondency, and depression.

“Yet, of all people, we as Latter-day Saints should be the most optimistic and the least pessimistic. For while we know that ‘peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion,’ we are also assured that ‘the Lord shall have power over his saints, and shall reign in their midst.’ (D&C 1:35–36)” (Oct. 1986, p. 2).
President Benson then reviewed a dozen ways we can combat despondency, including repentance, prayer, service, priesthood blessings, wholesome music, and just plain endurance. On that last suggestion he gave this memorable advice: “There are times when you simply have to righteously hang on and outlast the devil until his depressive spirit leaves you.” (“Do Not Despair,” p. 5).

I like that. I think it will appeal to your young students also. Give them the prophets ways to combat discouragement and despair, and then tell them there will be times when they just have to “outlast the devil.” If that is their only recourse, the Lord will help them succeed by that means.

One of Satan’s most potent techniques of discouragement is to deny the power of the Atonement by persuading a sinner that God cannot or will not forgive him or her. Or, he may seek to persuade a sinner that he is so depraved that he must not forgive himself. We should teach the discouraged that part of the process of repentance is to let go of our sins, to yield them up to God and follow his example by forgiving ourselves as he forgave us.

In conclusion, President Benson said: “We can rise above the enemies of despair, depression, discouragement, and despondency by remembering that God provides righteous alternatives, some of which I have mentioned. As it states in the Bible, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it’ (1 Cor 10:13.” (“Do Not Despair,” p. 5).

I hope you will help your students feel their relationship to God, feel his concern for them, and feel his love for them. That love is manifest in the Atonement, and we accept that love when we practice the principle of repentance.

Repentance is a continuing process, needed by all because “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). Teach your students that full repentance is possible and that thereafter forgiveness is certain.

How precious the promise that god will take “away the guilt from our hearts, through he merits of his Son” (Alma 24:10).

How comforting the promise that “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isa 1:18).

How glorious God’s own promise that “he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more” (D&C 58:42; see also Jere 31:34; Hebr 8:12).

By his atoning sacrifice our Savior brought about what Amulek called “the bowels of mercy, which overpowereith justice” (Alma 34:15).

The relationship between justice and mercy and the Atonement is nowhere more succinctly or more beautifully expressed than by Eliza R. Snow in the fifth verse of that wonderful hymn “How Great the Wisdom and the Love”:

How great, how glorious, how complete,
Redemption’s grand design,
Where justice, love, and mercy meet
In harmony divine! (Hymns, no. 195).

And so we join our voices with the prophet Jacob, who declared that “my soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord … in his grace, and in his justice, and power, and mercy in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death” (2 Ne 11:5). In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

COMPARISON

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject:</th>
<th>Laws of God</th>
<th>Laws of Man</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercy</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Atonement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Requirement of repentance</td>
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<td>Confession</td>
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<td>Restitution</td>
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<td>Suffering</td>
<td>Transgressor’s</td>
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<td>Unrepentant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repentant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Savior’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change of Life</td>
<td>X</td>
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Legend:  X = major  
– = minor  
0 = no concern