Repentance—A Gift from God
Conditions of Forgiveness

James E. Talmage, quoted in Church News, 17 October 1970, 2. The gift of repentance is extended to men as they humble themselves before the Lord; it is the testimony of the Spirit in their hearts. If they hearken not unto the monitor it will leave them for that Spirit of God strives not ever with man. (Articles of Faith, 114.)

Ezra Taft Benson, Ensign, Oct. 1989, 4. ...godly sorrow is defined as a sorrow that leads us to repentance. Godly sorrow is a gift of the Spirit. It is a deep realization that our actions have offended our Father and our God. It is the sharp and keen awareness that our behavior caused the Savior, He who knew no sin, even the greatest of all, to endure agony and suffering. Our sins caused Him to bleed at every pore. This very real mental and spiritual anguish is what the scriptures refer to as having 'a broken heart and a contrite spirit.' (See 3 Ne 9:20; Moro 6:2; D&C 20:37; 59:8; Ps 34:18; 51:17; Isa 57:15.) Such a spirit is the absolute prerequisite for true repentance.

James E. Talmage, The Articles of Faith, 114. Repentance is a Gift from God—Repentance is a means of pardon and is therefore one of God’s great gifts to man. It is not to be had for the careless asking; it may not be found upon the highway; nevertheless it is given with boundless liberality unto those who have brought forth works that warrant its bestowal. (See Mt 3:7,8; Acts 11:18; 26:20) Paul also, in writing to the Romans, teaches that repentance comes through the goodness of God.

Harold B. Lee, Youth & the Church, 100-103. (Quoting Joseph F. Smith.) One may not wallow in the mire of filth and sin and conduct his life in a manner unlawful in the sight of God and then suppose that repentance will wipe out the effects of his sin and place him on the level he would have been on had he always lived a righteous and virtuous life. May I quote from a prophet of the Lord on this subject:

He [the sinner] may and will be forgiven if he repents, the blood of Christ will make him free, and will wash him clean, though his sins be as scarlet; but all this will not return him any loss sustained. Nor will it place him in a position where he would have been had he not committed wrong. He has lost something which can never be regained notwithstanding the forgiveness of God. (President Joseph F. Smith, Gospel Doctrine, 468.)

There are no successful sinners. All must one day stand before God and be judged, each according to the deeds done in the flesh. What do you think now? Is the burden of the sinner lighter than that of a saint?

Boyd K. Packer, “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” Conference Report, Sep-Oct 1995, footnote 15 (Folio Views from the Internet). Forgiveness will come eventually to all repentant souls who have not committed the unpardonable sin. Forgiveness does not, however, necessarily ensure exaltation, as is the case with David (see D&C 132:38-39 ... Acts 2:25-27; Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 339.)

President Ezra Taft Benson, Ensign, May 1986, 45. (General Conference.) President Kimball was emphatic on this point. In his marvelous book The Miracle of Forgiveness, he stated: “The man who resists temptation and lives without sin is far better off than the man who has fallen, no matter how repentant the latter may be. How much better it is never to have committed sin!”

President Ezra Taft Benson, Ensign, May 1986, 44-45. (General Conference.) ... it is not pleasing to the Lord prior to a mission, or at any other time, to sow one's wild oats, to engage in sexual transgression of any nature, and then to expect that planned confession and quick repentance will satisfy the Lord.

President Ezra Taft Benson, Ensign, October 1989, 4. It is not uncommon to find men and women in the world who feel remorse for the things they do wrong. Sometimes this is because their actions cause them or loved ones great sorrow and misery. Sometimes their sorrow is caused because they are caught and punished for their actions. Such worldly feelings do not constitute “godly sorrow.”

Sharing the Gospel Instructor's Guide, monthly, 9. Reformation of one’s life is not necessarily repentance. True repentance cannot occur if it is not initiated by faith in Christ.

President Benson said the same thing: “repentance means more than simply a reformation of behavior. Many men and women in the world demonstrate great willpower and self-discipline in overcoming bad habits and the weaknesses of the flesh. Yet at the same time they give no thought to the Master, sometimes even openly rejecting Him. Such changes of behavior, even if in a positive direction, do not constitute true repentance.” (Ensign, October 1989, pg. 2.)

Repentance — Orson F. Whitney, Saturday Night Thoughts, 225-229.

“Sin No More.”—Repentance is not that superficial
sorrow felt by the wrongdoer when “caught in the act”—a sorrow not for sin, but for sin's detection. Chagrin is not repentance. Mortification and shame alone bring no change of heart toward right feeling and right living. Even remorse is not all there is to repentance. In highest meaning and fullest measure, repentance is equivalent to reformation; the beginning of the reformatory process being a resolve to “sin no more.” “By this ye may know that a man repenteth of his sins: Behold he will confess them and forsake them.” The first thing necessary, however, is for the sinner to acknowledge to himself that he has done wrong. Without that, there can be no real repentance, no real confession.

What is Sin?—Sin is the transgression of divine law. A man sins when he violates his conscience, going contrary to light and knowledge—not the light and knowledge that has come to his neighbor, but that which has come to himself. He sins when he does the opposite of what he knows to be right. Up to that point he only blunders. One may suffer painful consequences for only blundering, but he cannot commit sin unless he knows better than to do the thing in which the sin consists. One must have a conscience before he can violate it. “Where there is no law given, there is no punishment . . . no condemnation.” “He that knoweth not good from evil is blameless.”

Degrees of Damnation.—Souls who know that they have sinned, and who refuse to forsake their sins, will be damned. They damn themselves by that refusal. Damnation is no part of the Gospel. It is simply the sad alternative, the inevitable consequence of rejecting the offer of salvation. Damnation (condemnation) is not necessarily permanent, and it may exist in degrees, the degree being determined by the measure of culpability in the one condemned. Even the damned can be saved if they repent.

The Sin Unpardonable.—It is possible, however, to sin so far and so deeply that repentance is impossible. Shakespeare puts into the mouth of one of his characters—the guilty King Claudius—this speech:

“Try what repentance can: what can it not? Yet what can it when one cannot repent?”

Those who cannot repent are sons of perdition. Their sin is unpardonable, involving utter recreancy to divine light and power previously possessed. If they could repent they could be saved. But there is no salvation without repentance.

The Washing of Regeneration.—Sin must not only be repented of; it must be blotted out. The soul must be cleansed of it. Baptism is the soul-cleansing process, the divinely instituted means whereby sins are remitted—that is, forgiven and washed away.

Immersion, which symbolizes birth, or burial and resurrection is the true form of the baptismal ordinance. Baptism means immersion, and it is the third principle of the Gospel.

Divine Illumination.—The soul cleansed from sin is in a condition to enjoy the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, which “dwelleth not in unclean tabernacles.” Through this precious gift comes the divine light that “leads into all truth,” making manifest the things of God, past; present, and to come. There is a light that illumines, in greater or less degree, every soul that cometh into the world; but the gift of the Holy Ghost, imparted by the laying on of hands of one divinely authorized to bestow it, is a special endowment, possessed only by those having membership in the Church of Christ. Each member is thus given a direct personal testimony of the Truth, and is founded upon the Rock of Revelation, against which “the gates of hell” cannot prevail.

Gospel Principles Eternal.—The Everlasting Gospel is not an empty phrase. It means just what it says. The principles underlying it are eternal. “Intelligence or the light of truth was not created or made, neither indeed can be.” The same is true of faith and repentance. God did not create them. They are self-existent. Such ordinances as baptism by immersion for the remission of sins, and the laying on of hands for the gift (giving) of the Holy Ghost, might indeed be created, and doubtless were; but not the fundamental facts upon which they are based. It did not require a divine edict to make washing (baptism) a prerequisite to cleanliness; nor light (the Holy Spirit) a means of illumination. A code or system of laws and ordinances can readily be conceived of as a creation. Not so the principles embodied therein. The Gospel, like all other creations, was organized out of materials already in existence—eternal principles adapted to the needs of man and the purposes of Deity. The Supreme Intelligence, recognizing these principles as ennobling and exalting in their tendency, created a plan embodying them as the most effectual means for man's uplift and promotion. That plan is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Whitney Notes

4 D. & C. 58:43.
5 2 Nephi 9:25.
6 Alma 29:5.
7 Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 3.
8 D&C 93:29