Teachings Concerning

Sin and its Consequences

I. What is Sin?

James 4:17
Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

1 John 3:4
Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

1 John 5:17
All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

Harold B. Lee,
- What is sin? The apostle John described it or defined it as the transgression of the law. "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4.) Brigham Young made that definition still more meaningful when he said that "sin consists in doing wrong when we know and can do better, and it will be punished with a just retribution, in the due time of the Lord." (Journal of Discourses 2:133.) [Stand Ye In Holy Places, p.362]
- Sin may be defined as any want of conformity to or transgression of a rule or law of right or duty, as made known by your conscience or the revealed word of God. Such non-conformity or transgression of divine law might be either by omission or commission, or in other words sin may be either the willful breaking of divine law or you may sin by your failure and neglect in thought, word, or deed to keep the commandments of the Lord. One may sin by being hasty in judgment on vital issues or where the welfare of a human soul is at stake, and "he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin" (D&C 64:9). [The Teachings of Harold B. Lee, p. 108]

Dallin H. Oaks
The breaking of a commandment of God is sin. (Ensign, July 1992, pp. 70)

Bruce R. McConkie
What is sin? John said: "All unrighteousness is sin." (1 John 5:17.) Also: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4.) Paul taught: "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23.) James explained: "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (Jas. 4:17.) It should be noted that all of these statements were addressed to members of the Church who had received the gospel law.

Elder Orson F. Whitney made this explanation: "Sin is the transgression of divine law, as made known through the conscience or by revelation. 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." (Saturday Night Thoughts, p. 239.) "Where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation." (2 Ne. 9:25.) "He that knoweth not good from evil is blameless." (Alma 29:5.)

Sin cannot be committed unless laws are ordained (Alma 42:17) and unless people have knowledge of those laws so that they can violate them. Adam and Eve could not commit sin while in the Garden of Eden, although laws of conduct had already been established, because the knowledge of good and evil had not yet been given them. Unless they had partaken of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil "they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin." (2 Ne. 2:23.)

This is the same principle used by our Lord in condemning the wicked Pharisees: "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth." (John 9:41.) It is on this principle also that little children "cannot sin until they begin to become accountable," because in their innocent state they are without "knowledge." (D. & C. 29:46-50; Moro. 8:8.) [Mormon Doctrine, pp.735-736 SIN]
James E. Talmage

What is the nature of sin? To this question the Apostle John replies: “Sin is the transgression of the law.” In the original language of the Biblical records, many words occur for which our single term sin is used, all, however, conveying the common idea of opposition to the divine will. As God is the embodiment of perfection, such opposition is rebellion against the principles of advancement and adherence to the practises that lead to degradation. Sin is any condition, whether omission of things required or in commission of acts forbidden, that tends to prevent or hinder the development of the human soul. As a righteous course leads to eternal life, so sin tends toward the darkness of the second death. Sin was introduced to the world by Satan [See P. of G.P., Moses 4:4; see also Gen., chap. 3.]; yet it is by divine permission that mankind are brought in contact with sin, the contrast between evil and good thus being learned by experience.

According to the technical definition of sin it consists in the violation of law, and in this strict sense sin may be committed inadvertently or in ignorance. It is plain, however, from the scriptural doctrine of human responsibility and the unerring justice of God, that in his transgressions as in his righteous deeds man will be judged according to his ability to comprehend and obey law. To him who has never been made acquainted with a higher law the requirements of that law do not apply in their fulness. For sins committed without knowledge -- that is, for laws violated in ignorance -- a propitiation has been provided in the atonement wrought through the sacrifice of the Savior; and sinners of this class do not stand condemned, but shall be given opportunity yet to learn and to accept or reject the principles of the Gospel.

Jacob taught this doctrine: “Where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him. For the atonement satisfies the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone which is endless torment; and they are restored to that God who gave them breath, which is the Holy One of Israel.” And then, in contrast, the prophet adds: “But wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state!” [2 Nephi 9:25-27] This is in strict agreement with the teachings of Paul to the Romans, “For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law” [Rom. 2:12; see also Acts 17:30, 31]. And the word of modern scripture is to the same effect, for we are told, through recent revelation to the Church, that among those who are to receive the blessings of redemption are “they who died without law”[D&C 76:72]. These will include the heathen nations, whose redemption is promised with the added declaration that “they that knew no law shall have part in the first resurrection” [D&C 45:54]. (Articles of Faith, pp.57-59)

II. Source of Sin

The Natural Man

Moses 6:55
And the Lord spake unto Adam, saying: Inasmuch as thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts, and they taste the bitter, that they may know to prize the good.

2 Nephi 2:28-29
And now, my sons, I would that ye should look to the great Mediator, and hearken unto his great commandments; and be faithful unto his words, and choose eternal life, according to the will of his Holy Spirit;

And not choose eternal death, according to the will of the flesh and the evil which is therein, which giveth the spirit of the devil power to captivate, to bring you down to hell, that he may reign over you in his own kingdom.

Ether 3:2
O Lord, thou hast said that we must be encompassed about by the floods. Now behold, O Lord, and do not be angry with thy servant because of his weakness before thee; for we know that thou art holy and dwellest in the heavens, and that we are unworthy before thee; because of the fall our natures have become evil continually; nevertheless, O Lord, thou hast given us a commandment that we must call upon thee, that from thee we may receive according to our desires.

Bruce R. McConkie
The natural birth creates a natural man, and the
natural man is an enemy to God. In his fallen state he is carnal, sensual, and devilish by nature. Appetites and passions govern his life and he is alive -- acutely so -- to all that is evil and wicked in the world. (A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, p. 282).

Satan

Moses 5:13

I am also a son of God; and he commanded them, saying: Believe it not; and they believed it not, and they loved Satan more than God. And men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual, and devilish.

Mosiah 4:14

And ye will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked; neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the master of sin, or who is the evil spirit which hath been spoken of by our fathers, he being an enemy to all righteousness.

Alma 5:40

Whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.

Helaman 6:30

And behold, it is he [Satan] who is the author of all sin.

Harold B. Lee

The source of sin is a subject oft debated and theorized by philosophers and others as to how it originates and whence it comes, but we with the sacred scriptures are left with a certainty that removes all question as to the author and the beginning of sin. The record tells us that Satan came among the children of Adam and Eve and said unto them:

“I am also a son of God; and he commanded them, saying: Believe it not; and they believed it not, and they loved Satan more than God. And men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual, and devilish.” (Moses 5:13.)

And then King Benjamin taught:

“. . . neither will ye suffer that they transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another, and serve the devil, who is the master of sin, or who is the evil spirit which hath been spoken of by our fathers, he being an enemy to all righteousness.” (Mosiah 4:14.)

The Master understood how powerful was this master of sin when He spoke of him as the “Prince of this world,” and He taught his disciples to pray that they might not be led into temptation.

This, like that other highway to the Utah State Prison, is also a very short highway down the road of sin. You will remember the Lord’s warning to Cain when He said, “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. (Genesis 4:7.) It is just that short to the way of sin -- right at our very doors. (Stand Ye In Holy Places, pp.362-363)

Bruce R. McConkie

Both Satan and Cain bear the title father of lies, both having been liars from the beginning. (2 Ne. 9:9; Moses 5: 18-27.) The name signifies authorship and sponsorship of all that is dishonest and which leads away from the truth. In a similar sense Satan is the master of sin (Mosiah 4:14) and the father of secret combinations and every evil thing. (2 Ne. 26:22; Hela. 6:26; Moro. 7:12.)

In the ultimate sense, there are only two beings to whom service is rendered, God or the devil. By keeping the commandments men serve God and further his interests; by failing to obey his law, they “serve the devil, who is the master of sin.” (Mosiah 4:14; Alma 5:37-42.)

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” (Matt. 6:24; 3 Ne. 13:24.) When the mammon of this world takes precedence, in a man’s heart, over the things of righteousness, that man, most assuredly, is not serving God. “Choose you this day whom ye will serve.” (Josh. 24:15; Alma 30:8.)

Sin is of the devil. “Whatsoever is evil cometh from the devil.” (Alma 5:40.) He is “the master of sin” (Mosiah 4:14), “the author of all sin” (Hela. 6:30); he “is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually.” (Moro. 7:12.) During the millennium, when Satan is bound, “children shall grow up without sin unto salvation.” (D. & C. 45:58.) By committing sin men place themselves in subjection to Satan (D. & C. 29:40); they become his servants and receive “wages of him.” (Alma 5:38-43.) “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.” (John 8:34.) [Mormon Doctrine, p.706 SERVICE]
III. Consequences of Sin

Romans 5:12

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death.

David O. McKay

He had given himself to indulgence and sin and was then and is now reaping the wages thereof. His looks, feelings, demeanor -- all bore mute witness to the fact that “. . . the wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23.)

Death in the literal sense means extinction or cessation of life. It also means “spiritual lifelessness” and a failure to respond to one’s environment. Death is the opposite of life. It is in reality the result of ignorance of God and of his laws; for knowledge of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent is eternal life. To the extent that one breaks the law governing physical growth, to that extent one impairs one’s health, and thereby deprives oneself of so much opportunity to live.

To violate a law governing intellectual attainment is to weaken to a degree the intellect, and to transgress the laws governing spiritual attainment is to lose to a certain degree spiritual life. “An extreme violation may bring total cessation or death; that is, may make it impossible for the physical man to respond to physical environment. Every little transgression, then, has a tendency to produce, and does to a limited extent produce death.”

In Every-Day Ethics, sin is defined as a “wilful abandonment of any chosen purpose, it is disloyalty to your own ties, it is your own power used to destroy you. Laziness, selfishness, cowardice, blindness, always hurt you in carrying out that life for which you were meant.” Thus we see how the youth to whom we refer had in blindness and weakened will, impaired the only forces he possessed with which to build the sterling character he at one time dreamed himself to become.

We are in a world of inexorable law. If we obey the laws of sin, we reap the reward of sin; if the laws of righteousness, we reap the reward of righteousness. How clearly the Prophet Joseph Smith set forth this truth in the revelation that says, “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 upon which it is predicated.” (D. & C. 130:20-21.)

How great, how glorious is the gospel of Jesus Christ that sets forth in clearness and simplicity the laws of life. Mormonism, so-called, embraces all these laws, and is, therefore, truly the philosophy of living. How tragic that end which comes through disobedience to these laws. Such an end is marked by physical debility, heartaches, discouragement, self-condemnation, sadness, abandonment, despair, death; “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom. 6:23.) [Gospel Ideals, pp.538-540]

Violation of Eternal Law
Brings Eternal Consequences

Alma 42:12, 14

And now, there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience . . .

And thus we see 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.

Dallin H. Oaks

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” (Mosiah 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. (“Sins, Crimes, and Atonement,” An Address given to CES religious educators, 7 February
Boyd K. Packer

Natural and spiritual laws which govern life were instituted from before the foundation of the world [see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, pp. 308, 367]. They are eternal, as are the consequences for either obeying or disobeying them. They are not based on social or political considerations. They cannot be changed. No pressure, no protest, no legislation can alter them. (“For Time and All Eternity,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, p. 22)

Richard G. Scott

- Every incorrect choice we make, every sin we commit is a violation of eternal law. That violation brings negative results we generally soon recognize. There are also other consequences of our acts of which we may not be conscious. They are nonetheless real. They can have a tremendous effect on the quality of our life here and most certainly will powerfully affect it hereafter. We can do nothing of ourselves to satisfy the demands of justice for a broken eternal law. Yet, unless the demands of justice are paid, each of us will suffer endless negative consequences. Only the life, teachings, and particularly the atonement of Jesus Christ can release us from this otherwise impossible predicament. Each of us has made mistakes, large or small, which if unresolved will keep us from the presence of God. (“Finding Forgiveness,” *Ensign*, May 1995, p. 75)

- But our Eternal Father defined truth and established what is right and wrong before the creation of this earth. He also fixed the consequences of obedience and disobedience to those truths. He defended our right to choose our path in life so that we would grow, develop, and be happy, but we do not have the right to choose the consequences of our acts. Those who willfully, consistently disobey His commandments will inevitably learn that truth. (“Healing Your Damaged Life,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, p. 61)

### Man Cannot Redeem Himself From the Eternal Consequences of Sin

**Alma 22:14**

And since man had fallen he could not merit anything of himself.

**Brigham Young**

A divine debt has been contracted by the children, and the Father demands recompense. He says to his children on this earth, who are in sin and transgression, it is impossible for you to pay this debt . . . unless God provides a Savior to pay this debt it can never be paid. (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p.59)

**Bruce R. McConkie**

Punishment for sin is part of the divine plan. Indeed according to the law of agency, which is the law of opposites and of an opposition in all things, there could be no rewards unless there were also punishments. And yet many people are troubled in their minds, as was Corianton, “concerning the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner”; they “try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery.” (Alma 42:1.) They choose to believe that God so abounds in mercy and is such a being of love and kindness that he will not impose eternal misery and woe upon any of his children.

The reason why punishments must be imposed is found in a correct understanding of the plan of salvation, with particular reference to the fall of Adam and the probationary way of life thereby created. Endowed with agency, having power in himself to obey or disobey, Adam was commanded not to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The penalty for eating the forbidden fruit was that he would die spiritually and temporally. He chose to partake. Having partaken, could the Lord in justice do other than impose the penalty? Can the word of God return unto him void? Adam transgressed and Adam paid the penalty for his transgression; he died spiritually and he died temporally.

And as with Adam, so with his seed. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Romans 5:12.) In this mortal probation men have agency; they can choose for themselves. While here they are subject to laws -- the laws of God the laws of nature, the laws of men. And every law carries its own penalty. All men commit sin. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23.) “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him [God] a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:8, 10.) And as with Adam, so with all men; the justice of God requires that they pay the penalty for their disobedience. That penalty is to die spiritually, to die as to things of righteousness, to be cast out of the presence of God.

If there were no resurrection, all men would remain subject to temporal death forever; if there were no eternal
life all men would remain spiritually dead forever; all would continue to suffer for their sins everlastingly. Hence the divine plan called for a Redeemer, for a Savior, for one who could ransom men from their fallen state, for one who could pay the penalty for their sins. Thus, Alma tells his wayward son Corianton: “As the soul [spirit] could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal, that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord, it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death.” Otherwise men, having become “carnal, sensual, and devilish by nature,” and being subject to sin, would, after their temporal death, remain “miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord.”

Because man could not redeem himself (that is, because he could not resurrect himself), and because he could not ransom himself from spiritual death (that is, because he could not, in the justice of God, return to the Divine Presence while in his sins), there must needs be a plan of redemption. [A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, pp.93-94]

IV. Punishments for Sin

2 Nephi 2:10

And because of the intercession for all, all men come unto God; wherefore, they stand in the presence of him, to be judged of him according to the truth and holiness which is in him. Wherefore, the ends of the law which the Holy One hath given, unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed, which punishment that is affixed is in opposition to that of the happiness which is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement--

Dallin H. Oaks

For every sin there is “a punishment affixed.” (Alma 42:18; see also Amos 3:1–2.) [“Sin and Suffering,” Ensign, July 1992, 70]

James E. Talmage

Punishment is inflicted upon the sinner for disciplinary and reformatory purposes and in accordance with justice. There is nothing of vindictiveness or of desire to cause suffering manifest in the divine nature; on the contrary, our Father is cognizant of every pang, and permits such to afflict for beneficent purposes only. God’s mercy is declared in the retributive pains that He allows, as in the blessings of peace that issue from Him. It is scarcely profitable to speculate as to the exact nature of the spiritual suffering imposed as punishment for sin. Comparison with physical pain [See D&C 76:36, 44; see also Jacob 6: 10; Alma 12: 16, 17; 3 Nephi 27: 11, 12.], such as the tortures of fire in a sulphurous lake, serve to show that the human mind is incapable of comprehending the extent of these penalties. The sufferings entailed by the fate of condemnation are more to be feared than are any possible inflictions of physical torture; the mind, the spirit, the whole soul is doomed to suffer, and the torment is known by none in the flesh.

Consider the word of the Lord regarding those whose sin is the unpardonable one, whose transgression has carried them beyond the present horizon of possible redemption; those who have sunk so low in their wickedness as to have lost the power and even the desire to attempt reformation [See D&C 76:26, 32, 43; John 17:12; 2 Thess. 2:3]. Sons of Perdition they are called. These are they who, having learned the power of God afterward renounce it; those who sin wilfully in the light of knowledge; those who open their hearts to the Holy Spirit and then put the Lord to a mockery and a shame by denying it; and those who commit murder wherein they shed innocent blood [See D&C 132:27]; these are they of whom the Savior has declared that it would be better for them had they never been born [See D&C 76:32; see also Matt. 26:24; Mark 14:21]. These are to share the punishment of the devil and his angels -- punishment so terrible that the knowledge is withheld from all except those who are consigned to this doom, though a temporary view of the picture is permitted to some [See D&C 76:45-48]. These sinners are the only ones over whom the second death hath power: “Yea, verily, the only ones who shall not be redeemed in the due time of the Lord” [D&C 76:38, 39]. (Articles of Faith, pp. 59-60)

Boyd K. Packer

Alma bluntly told his wayward son that “repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment.” [Alma 42:16]

The punishment may, for the most part, consist of the torment we inflict upon ourselves. It may be the loss of privilege or progress. ([Forgiveness will come eventually to all repentant souls who have not committed the unpardonable sin [see Matt. 12:31]. Forgiveness does not, however, necessarily assure exaltation, as is the case with David [see D&C 132:38–39; see also Ps. 16:10; Acts]...
We are punished by our sins, if not for them. (‘The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,’ *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 19)

**Joseph Fielding Smith**

- The laws of God are immutable, and from this explanation we learn that the same punishment always follows the same offense, according to the laws of God who is eternal and endless, hence it is called, endless punishment, and eternal punishment, because it is the punishment which God has fixed according to unchangeable law. A man may partake of endless torment, and when he has paid the penalty for his transgression, he is released, but the punishment remains and awaits the next culprit, and so on forever. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:228)

- Some among us have the idea that to confess their sins with their lips and to turn away from them constitutes all that is required of the repentant. This is not always so. It is our duty to forgive, but the Lord may require a severe penalty after this humble repentance. David sorely repented; read some of his Psalms and realize how he cried in anguish for relief; yet we understand that he is paying the price to this day and will until the Son of God comes to relieve him. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, 2:97)

**Punishments for Sin Not Eternal**

*D&C 19:4-12*

And surely every man must repent or suffer, for I, God, am endless.

Wherefore, I revoke not the judgments which I shall pass, but woes shall go forth, weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, yea, to those who are found on my left hand.

Nevertheless, it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written endless torment. Again, it is written eternal damnation; wherefore it is more express than other scriptures, that it might work upon the hearts of the children of men, altogether for my name's glory. ... For, behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore -- Eternal punishment is God's punishment. Endless punishment is God's punishment. ... Therefore I command you to repent -- repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and 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.” (*D&C* 19:4-17.) [*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, pp. 96-97]

**Bruce R. McConkie**

The extent of one’s punishment depends upon the degree of his disobedience. Even hell shall deliver up the dead which are in it, so that the once buffeted souls may attain a celestial inheritance. The nature of eternal punishment is set forth by the Lord in these words: “Surely every man must repent or suffer, for I, God, am endless.” These are the alternatives that face mankind; repentance begets mercy, otherwise the law inflicts a just penalty. “I revoke not the judgments which I shall pass,” saith the Lord, “but woes shall go forth, weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, yea, to those who are found on my left hand.” The judgments of the Lord are sure; justice will always prevail where the wicked and ungodly are concerned. “Nevertheless, it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written endless torment. Again, it is written eternal damnation; wherefore it is more express than other scriptures, that it might work upon the hearts of the children of men, altogether for my name’s glory. ... For, behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore -- Eternal punishment is God’s punishment. Endless punishment is God’s punishment. ... Therefore I command you to repent -- repent, lest I smite you by the rod of my mouth, and by my wrath, and by my anger, and 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.” (*D&C* 19:4-17.) [*A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, pp. 96-97]

**James E. Talmage**

- The Duration of punishment -- As to the duration of punishment, we may take assurance that it will be graded according to the sin; and that the conception of every sentence for misdeeds being interminable is false [See *D&C* 19:6-12; 76:36, 44]. Great as is the effect of this life upon the hereafter, and certain as is the responsibility of opportunities lost for repentance, God holds the power to pardon beyond the grave. Yet the scriptures speak of eternal and endless punishment. Any punishment ordained of God is eternal, for He is eternal [See *D&C* 19:1-12]. His is a system of endless punishment, for it will always exist as a place or condition prepared for disobedient
spirits; yet the infliction of the penalty will have an end in every case of acceptable repentance and reparation. And repentance is not impossible in the spirit world [See 1 Peter 3: 18-20; 4:6; D&C 76:73]. However, as seen, there are some sins so great that their consequent punishments are not made known to man [See D&C 76:45]; these extreme penalties are reserved for the sons of Perdition.

The false doctrine that the punishment to be visited upon erring souls is endless, that every sentence for sin is of Interminable duration, must be regarded as one of the most pernicious results of misapprehension of scripture. It is but a dogma of unauthorized and erring sectaries, at once unscriptural, unreasonable, and revolting to one who loves mercy and honors justice. True, the scriptures speak of everlasting burnings, eternal damnation, and the vengeance of eternal fire [See Matt. 18:8; 25:41, 46; 2 Thess. 1:9; Mark 3:29; Jude 7], as characteristics of the judgment provided for the wicked; yet in no instance is there justification for the inference that the individual sinner will have to suffer the wrath of offended justice forever and ever. The punishment in any case is sufficiently severe without the added and supreme horror of unending continuation. Justice must have her due; but when “the uttermost farthing” is paid, the prison doors shall open and the captive be free. But the prison remains, and the law prescribing punishment for offenses is not to be repealed.

So general were the ill effects of the commonly accepted doctrine, unscriptural and untrue though it was, regarding the endless torment awaiting every sinner, that even before the Church had been formally organized in the present dispensation, the Lord gave a revelation through the Prophet Joseph Smith touching this matter, in which we read: “And surely every man must repent or suffer; for I, God, am endless. Wherefore, I revoke not the judgments which I shall pass, but woes shall go forth, weeping, wailing and grashing of teeth, yea, to those who are found on my left hand. Nevertheless, it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written endless torment. Again, it is written eternal damnation. *** For behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore, Eternal punishment is God’s punishment. Endless punishment is God’s punishment” [Revelation, given March, 1830; D&C 19:4-12] (Articles of Faith, pp.59-62)

• During this hundred years [since the restoration of the Church] many other great truths not known before, have been declared to the people, and one of the greatest is that to hell there is an exit as well as an entrance. Hell is no place to which a vindictive judge sends prisoners to suffer and to be punished principally for his glory; but it is a place prepared for the teaching, the disciplining of those who failed to learn here upon the earth what they should have learned. True, we read of everlasting punishment, unending suffering, eternal damnation. That is a direful expression; but in his mercy the Lord has made plain what those words mean. "Eternal punishment," he says, is God's punishment, for he is eternal; and that condition or state or possibility will ever exist for the sinner who deserves and really needs such condemnation; but this does not mean that the individual sufferer or sinner is to be eternally and everlastingly made to endure and suffer. No man will be kept in hell longer than is necessary to bring him to a fitness for something better. When he reaches that stage the prison doors will open and there will be rejoicing among the hosts who welcome him into a better state. The Lord has not abated in the least what he has said in earlier dispensations concerning the operation of his law and his gospel, but he has made clear unto us his goodness and mercy through it all, for it is his glory and his work to bring about the immortality and eternal life of man. (Conference Report, April 1930, p.97)

V. Redemption from Sin Through Atonement

2 Nephi 2:4-7

And the way is prepared from the fall of man, and salvation is free.

And men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off.

Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever.

Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth.

Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to
answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a
broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can
the ends of the law be answered.

Alma 22:14
Since man had fallen he could not merit anything of
himself; but the sufferings and death of Christ atone for
their sins, through faith and repentance.

Alma 34:8
And now, behold, I will testify unto you of myself that
these things are true. Behold, I say unto you, that I do
know that Christ shall come among the children of men,
to take upon him the transgressions of his people, and that
he shall atone for the sins of the world; for the Lord God
hath spoken it.

For it is expedient that an atonement should be made;
for according to the great plan of the Eternal God there
must be an atonement made, or else all mankind must
unavoidably perish; yea, all are hardened; yea, all are
fallen and are lost, and must perish except it be through
the atonement which it is expedient should be made.

Alma 42:15
And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought
about except an atonement should be made; therefore 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.

Brigham Young
A divine debt has been contracted by the children, and
the Father demands recompense. He says to his children
on this earth, who are in sin and transgression, it is
impossible for you to pay this debt; I have prepared a
sacrifice; I will send my Only Begotten Son to pay this
divine debt. Was it necessary then that Jesus should die?
Do we understand why he should sacrifice his life? . . . .
Is this easy to understand? It is perfectly easy to me;
and my advice to those who have queries and doubts on
this subject is, when they reason and philosophize upon it,
not to plant their position in falsehood or argue
hypothetically, but upon the facts as they exist, and they
will come to the conclusion that unless God provides a
Savior to pay this debt it can never be paid. (Discourses
of Brigham Young, p.59)

John Taylor
But what is the reason for all this suffering and
bloodshed, and sacrifice? We are told that without
shedding of blood is no remission of sins. This is beyond
our comprehension. Jesus had to take away sin by the
sacrifice of himself, the just for the unjust, but, previous
to this grand sacrifice, these animals had to have their
blood shed as types, until the great antitype should offer
up himself once for all. And as he in his own person bore
the sins of all, and atoned for them by the sacrifice of
himself, so there came upon him the weight and agony of
ages and generations, the indescribable agony consequent
upon this great sacrificial atonement wherein he bore the
sins of the world, and suffered in his own person the
consequences of an eternal law of God broken by man.
Hence his profound grief, his indescribable anguish, his
overpowering torture, all experienced in the submission to
the eternal fiat of Jehovah and the requirements of an
inexorable law. (The Gospel Kingdom, p.116)

Spencer W. Kimball
• “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4.),
and for such transgression a punishment is affixed
under eternal law. Every normal individual is
responsible for the sins he commits, and would be
similarly liable to the punishment attached to those
broken laws. However, Christ’s death on the cross
offers us exemption from the eternal punishment for
most sins. He took upon himself the punishment for
the sins of all the world, with the understanding that
those who repent and come unto him will be forgiven
of their sins and freed from the punishment. (The
Miracle of Forgiveness, p.133)
• He suffered and died for us, yet if we do not repent,
all his anguish and pain on our account are futile.
(The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.70)
• The Lord is merciful, but mercy cannot rob justice.
His mercy extended to us when he died for us. His
justice prevails when he judges us and give us the
blessings which we have duly earned. (The Teachings
of Spencer W. Kimball, p.70)

Bruce R. McConkie
Because man could not redeem himself (that is,
because he could not resurrect himself), and because he
could not ransom himself from spiritual death (that is,
because he could not, in the justice of God, return to the
Divine Presence while in his sins), there must needs be a
plan of redemption. Arrangements must be made whereby
man could be redeemed from death hell the devil, and
endless torment. “Therefore, according to justice, the plan
of redemption could not be brought about, only on
conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state,
yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these
conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God. And thus we see 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.” Thanks be to God that there was a fall so there could be a plan of mercy and of redemption!

“And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore 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 42:9-15.) How great and wondrous are the ways of God whereby he made the fall the father of the atonement and of salvation!

Having so testified, Alma proceeds to reason about justice and mercy with the divine logic of a Lehi or a Paul.

“Now, repentance could not come unto men,” he continues, “except there were a punishment, which also was eternal as the life of the soul should be, affixed opposite to the plan of happiness, which was as eternal also as the life of the soul.” Repentance and punishment go together. If there were no punishment, what need would there be for repentance?

“Now, how could a man repent except he should sin? How could he sin if there was no law? How could there be a law save there was a punishment?” The reasoning is perfect. “Now, there was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto man.” The damnation of hell is in large measure nothing more than remorse of conscience.

“Now, if there was no law given -- if a man murdered he should die -- would he be afraid he would die if he should murder? And also, if there was no law given against sin men would not be afraid to sin. And if there was no law given, if men sinned what could justice do, or mercy either, for they would have no claim upon the creature?” Good questions these, philosophically sound, questions that prepare the mind for the declaration to follow.

“But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.” All men are sinners; those who repent gain mercy from the Lord; upon those who do not, a just God inflicts the punishment decreed for their disobedience.

“But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice. For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved.” Alma is giving, as no other prophet whose words have been preserved for us has ever done, the divine solution to the whole problem of punishment and rewards of sin and of repentance, of justice and mercy, and of salvation for the penitent.

“What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God. And thus God bringeth about his great and eternal purposes, which were prepared from the foundation of the world. And thus cometh about the salvation and the redemption of men, and also their destruction and misery.” (Alma 42:16-26.) [A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, pp.94-96]

VI. Individual Suffering Necessary for Redemption from Sin

Spencer W. Kimball

• One is not repentant until he bares his soul and admits his actions without excuses or rationalizations, until he has really and truly suffered. Suffering is a very important part of repentance. One has not begun to repent until he has suffered intensely for his sins. (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.88)

• We must remember that repentance is more than just saying, “I am sorry.” It is more than tears in one’s eyes. It is more than a half a dozen prayers. Repentance means suffering. If a person hasn't suffered, he hasn't repented. I don't care how many times he says he has. If he 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. Nobody can be forgiven unless there is adequate repentance. You bishops remember that, will you! The Savior can do almost anything in the world, but he can't forgive somebody who hasn't repented. (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.99)
Dallin H. Oaks

Another condition of repentance is suffering or punishment for the sin. In the words of Alma, “Repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment.” (Alma 42:16.)

Where there has been sin, there must be suffering.

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. (See D&C 19.) Here the Lord reminds us of “the great day of judgment” when all will be judged according to their works. (D&C 19:3.) He explains that the “endless” or “eternal” torment or punishment that comes from sin is not punishment without end. It is the punishment of God, who is endless and eternal. (See D&C 19:10–12.)

In this setting, the Savior of the world commands us to repent and keep his commandments. “Repent,” he commands, “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; “Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink— “Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men. “Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I humble you with my almighty power; and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these punishments of which I have spoken.” (D&C 19:15–20.)

As we consider these sobering words of the Savior, we realize that there is something very peculiar about the state of mind or “heart” of the person who deliberately commits sin in the expectation that he or she will speedily and comfortably repent and continue as a servant of God, preaching repentance and asking others to come unto Christ. I will illustrate the peculiarity of this attitude with an analogy.

The mother of a large family is burdened almost past the point of endurance. Every waking hour is spent serving the needs of her large family: meals, mending, transporting, counseling, caring for those who are sick, comforting those who mourn, and administering to every other need a mother can understand. She has committed herself to do everything within her power to serve the needs of her children.

She is giving her life for them. The children know she will attempt to carry whatever load is placed upon her. Most of them are considerate and do all they can to minimize her burden. But some, knowing of her willingness to serve, heedlessly pile more and more tasks on the weary mother. “Don’t worry about it” is their attitude; “she’ll carry it. She said she would. Drop it on Mom, and we’ll just have a good time.”

In this analogy, I am obviously likening the heedless children to those who sin in the expectation that someone else will bear the burden of suffering. The one who bears the burden is our Savior.

Am I suggesting that the benefits of the Atonement are not available for the person who heedlessly sins? Of course not. But I am suggesting that there is a relationship between sin and suffering that is not understood by people who knowingly sin in the expectation that all the burden of suffering will be borne by Another, that the sin is all theirs but that the suffering is all His. That is not the way. Repentance, which is an assured passage to an eternal destination, is nevertheless not a free ride.

Let us recall two scriptures: (1) “Repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment” (Alma 42:16); and (2) the Savior said 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).

This obviously means that the unrepentant transgressor must suffer for his own sins. Does it also 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 the Atonement, they will not experience the full, “exquisite” extent of eternal torment the Savior suffered.

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. … If a person hasn’t suffered, he hasn’t repented.” (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982, pp. 88, 99.)

The Savior taught this principle when he said that his 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 look “for shortcuts [to repentance] and easy answers, thinking that quick confessions or breezy apologies alone are enough.” (The Broken Heart, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1989, 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” (Mosiah 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 tells how “the very thought of coming into the presence of … God did rack [his] soul with inexpressible horror.” (Alma 36:14.) He speaks of being “harrowed up by the memory of [his] many sins.” (Alma 36:17.) 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 received “a remission of [his] sins.” (Alma 38:8.)

All of our personal 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.

In the August 1990 issue of the Ensign, a repenting transgressor who was excommunicated describes his personal feelings: he speaks of “tearful hours,” “wish[ing] to be covered by a million mountains,” “crushed by the shame,” “dark blackness,” and “anguish … as wide as eternity.” (Pp. 22–24.)

Why is it necessary for us to suffer on the way to repentance for serious transgressions? We tend to think of the results of repentance as simply cleansing us from sin. But 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 bends so deeply against the ground that the leaves become soiled with mud, like sin. If we focus only on cleaning the leaves, the weakness in the tree that allowed it to bend and soil its leaves may remain. Similarly, a person who is merely sorry to be soiled by sin will sin again in the next high wind. The susceptibility to repetition continues 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. That strengthening is essential for us to realize the purpose of the cleansing, 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 sinned 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.” (Mosiah 3:19.) This is what the scripture means in its explanation that a person who has repented of his sins will “forsake them.” (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 speak of a mighty change of heart. King Benjamin’s congregation described that mighty change by saying that they had “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually.” (Mosiah 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. (Alma 5:15.) Persons who have had that kind of change in their hearts have attained the strength and stature to dwell with God. That is what we call being saved. (“Sin and Suffering,” Ensign, July 1992, pp. 71-72)

Joseph Fielding Smith

Those who enter into the telestial kingdom, where their glories differ as do the stars of heaven in their magnitude, and who are innumerable as the sands of the seashore, are the ungodly, the filthy who suffer the wrath of God on the earth, who are thrust down to hell where they will be required to pay the uttermost farthing before
their redemption comes. These are they who receive not the gospel of Christ and consequently could not deny the Holy Spirit while living on the earth.

They have no part in the first resurrection and are not redeemed from the devil and his angels until the last resurrection, because of their wicked lives and their evil deeds. Nevertheless, even these are heirs of salvation, but before they are redeemed and enter into their kingdom, they must repent of their sins, and receive the gospel, and bow the knee, and acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer of the world.

All who have been filthy and who would not receive the truth and have not had the testimony of Jesus Christ, must suffer the torments of the damned until they are purged from their iniquity, for the blood of Jesus Christ will not cleanse them from their sins without their own individual suffering.

Nevertheless they shall come out of the prison eventually. These are the rest of the dead, spoken of by John, who do not live during the millennial reign, but afterwards; and these are assigned to a kingdom known as the telestial kingdom, and they are denied the privilege of dwelling with the Father and the Son, "worlds without end." The Lord will do for them the best he can under the circumstances, but since they have denied his power and have dwelt in iniquity, they cannot receive the blessings of the kingdom of God. (Doctrines of Salvation, 2:22-23)