

The Savior Wants to Forgive

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The Lord loves us and wants us to understand His willingness to forgive.

During the time of our Savior’s mortal ministry, many followed after Him, including scribes and Pharisees “out of every town of Galilee, ... Judaea, and Jerusalem.”¹ A bedridden, paralyzed man desiring to be healed was brought to a large gathering, but unable to get him close to the Savior, his friends took him to the roof of the house where the Savior was and lowered him down. Seeing this demonstration of faith, with a great purpose not yet known to His listeners, the Savior declared, “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.”²

This must have surprised the man, and although the scriptures say nothing of his reaction, he may have wondered if the Savior really understood why he had come.

The Savior knew that many people followed Him because of His mighty miracles. Already He had turned water to wine,³ cast out unclean spirits,⁴ and healed the nobleman’s son,⁵ a leper,⁶ Peter’s mother-in-law,⁷ and many others.⁸

But with this paralyzed man, the Lord chose to give evidence to both disciple and detractor of His unique role as Savior of the world. Hearing the Savior’s words, the scribes and Pharisees had begun to reason among themselves, ignorantly speaking of blasphemy while concluding that only God can forgive sin. Perceiving their thoughts, the Savior addressed them, saying:

“What reason ye in your hearts?

“Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?”⁹

Not waiting for their response, the Savior continued, “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power *upon earth* to forgive sins, [He then turned to the paralyzed man] I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.”¹⁰ And he did!

By this miraculous physical healing, the Savior confirmed to all of us this infinitely more powerful spiritual truth: the Son of Man forgives sins!

While this truth is readily accepted by all believers, not so easily acknowledged is the essential companion truth: the Savior forgives sins “upon earth” and not just at the Final Judgment. He does not excuse us *in* our sins.¹¹ He does not condone our return to past sins.¹² But when we repent and obey His gospel, He forgives us.¹³

In this forgiveness we see the enabling *and* the redeeming power of the Atonement harmoniously and graciously

applied. If we exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the enabling power of His Atonement *strengthens* us in our moment of need,¹⁴ and His redeeming power *sanctifies* us as we “[put] off the natural man.”¹⁵ This brings hope to all, especially to those who feel that recurring human weakness is beyond the Savior’s willingness to help and to save.

Providing an opportunity for the Savior to enlighten our understanding,¹⁶ Peter once inquired how many times he should forgive his brother and then asked, “Till seven times?” Surely that would be more than enough. But the Savior’s response opened wide the door to *His* merciful heart: “I say *not* unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.”¹⁷

The Lord loves us and wants us to understand His willingness to forgive. On more than 20 occasions in the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord told those to whom He was speaking, “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” or similar words.¹⁸ On about half of those occasions, the Lord’s words were directed specifically to the Prophet Joseph Smith, sometimes addressing him alone, sometimes with others.¹⁹ The first of these was recorded in 1830, the last in 1843. Thus, over a span of many years, the Lord told Joseph repeatedly, “Thy sins are forgiven thee.”

While Joseph was not “guilty of any great or malignant sins,”²⁰ we do well to remember that with very few exceptions, the Lord’s “seventy times seven” does not limit forgiveness according to the seriousness of the sin.

While speaking to elders assembled in Kirtland, the Lord said, “I will that ye should overcome the world; *wherefore* I will have compassion upon you.”²¹ The Lord knows our weakness and the eternal consequences of “the world” upon imperfect men and women.²² The word *wherefore* in this verse is His affirmation that it is only by virtue of His compassion that we may ultimately “overcome the world.” How is that compassion made manifest? To these same elders in Kirtland, He said, “I have forgiven you your sins.”²³ *The Savior wants to forgive.*

No one need suppose that this forgiveness comes without repentance. Indeed, the Lord has declared, “I, the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness,” and then He adds the cautionary qualifier “who have not sinned unto death.”²⁴ While the Lord “cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance,”²⁵ yet He differentiates the relative gravity of some sins. He stipulates there will be no forgiveness for “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.”²⁶ He declares the gravity of murder²⁷ and emphasizes the seriousness of sexual sin such as adultery.²⁸ With regard to repeated serious sexual sin, He makes known the increased difficulty of receiving His forgiveness.²⁹ And He has said that “he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation.”³⁰ Yet, in His mercy, He allows for improvement over time rather than demanding immediate perfection. Even with the multitude of sins occasioned by the weakness of mortality, as often as we repent and seek His forgiveness, He forgives again and again.³¹

Because of this, all of us, including those struggling to overcome addictive behaviors such as substance abuse or pornography and those close to them, can know that the Lord will recognize our righteous efforts and will lovingly forgive when repentance is complete, “until seventy times seven.” But this does not mean one may *willingly* return to sin with impunity.³²

The Lord is always interested in our hearts,³³ and rationalized false faith does not justify sin.³⁴ In this dispensation the Lord warned one of His servants against such rationalization by declaring, “Let [him] be ashamed of the Nicolaitane band and of all their secret abominations.”³⁵ The Nicolaitans were an ancient religious sect that claimed license to commit sexual sin by virtue of the Lord’s grace.³⁶ This is not pleasing to the

Lord.³⁷ His compassion and grace do not excuse us when “[our] hearts are not satisfied. And [we] obey not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness.”³⁸ Rather, after we do all we can do,³⁹ His compassion and grace are the means whereby “in process of time”⁴⁰ we overcome the world through the enabling power of the Atonement. As we humbly seek this precious gift, “weak things become strong unto [us],”⁴¹ and by *His* strength, we are made able to do that which we could never do alone.

The Lord looks upon the light we have received,⁴² the desires of our hearts,⁴³ and our actions,⁴⁴ and when we repent and seek His forgiveness, He forgives. As we consider our own lives and the lives of our loved ones and acquaintances, we should be equally willing to forgive ourselves and others.⁴⁵

Preach My Gospel speaks of the difficulty in overcoming addictive behavior and encourages priesthood leaders and members to “not be shocked or discouraged” if investigators or new members continue to struggle with such problems. Rather, we are counseled to “show confidence in the individual and not be judgmental ... [treating] it as a temporary and understandable setback.”⁴⁶ Could we do less with our own children or family members who struggle with similar problems, having temporarily strayed from the path of righteousness? Surely they merit our steadiness, patience, and love—and yes, our forgiveness.

In general conference just last October, President Monson counseled:

“We need to bear in mind that people can change. They can put behind them bad habits. They can repent from transgressions. ...

“... We can help them to overcome their shortcomings. We must develop the capacity to see men *not* as they are at present but as they may become.”⁴⁷

At an early conference of the Church, similar to this conference, the Lord told the members:

“Verily I say unto you, ye are clean, but not all; ...

“For *all flesh* is corrupted before me. ...

“... For verily some of you are guilty before me, *but I will be merciful unto your weakness.*”⁴⁸

His message is the same today.

Our Heavenly Father knows what we are facing, that we all sin and “come short of the glory of God”⁴⁹ again and again. He sent His Son, who “knoweth the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted.”⁵⁰ His Son teaches us to “pray always that [we] enter *not* into temptation.”⁵¹ We are told to “cry unto [God] for *mercy*; for he is mighty to save.”⁵² The Savior commands us to repent⁵³ and to forgive.⁵⁴ And although repentance is not easy, as we strive with all our hearts to obey His gospel, He gives this promise: “Verily I say unto you, notwithstanding [your] sins, *my bowels are filled with compassion towards [you]*. I will not utterly cast [you] off; *and in the day of wrath I will remember mercy.*”⁵⁵ The Savior wants to forgive.

Each week the Mormon Tabernacle Choir begins its inspiring broadcast with the uplifting words of William W. Phelps’s familiar hymn “Gently Raise the Sacred Strain.” Not as familiar are the comforting words of the fourth verse:

Holy, holy is the Lord.

Precious, precious is his word: ...
Repent and live;
Tho your sins be crimson red,
Oh, repent, and he'll forgive.⁵⁶

I invite you to remember and believe the words of the Lord and to exercise faith in Him unto repentance.⁵⁷ He loves you. He wants to forgive. I so testify in the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Luke 5:17; see also Mark 2:2.
2. Luke 5:20; see also Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:5.
3. See John 2:1–11.
4. See Mark 1:21–28; Luke 4:33–37.
5. See John 4:46–54.
6. See Matthew 8:1–4; Mark 1:40–45; Luke 5:12–15.
7. See Matthew 8:14–15; Mark 1:29–31; Luke 4:38–39.
8. See Matthew 8:16–17; Mark 1:32–34; Luke 4:40–41.
9. Luke 5:22–23; see also Matthew 9:3–5; Mark 2:6–9.
10. Luke 5:24; emphasis added; see also Matthew 9:6–7; Mark 2:10–12.

11. See 1 Corinthians 6:9–10; Alma 11:34, 37; Helaman 5:10–11.

12. See 2 Peter 2:20; James 2:10; Doctrine and Covenants 82:7.

13. See Isaiah 1:18; Jeremiah 31:34; Luke 7:36–50; Enos 1:5; Alma 24:10; Moroni 6:8; Doctrine and Covenants 1:32; 58:42–43.

14. See Jacob 4:7; Alma 14:26; Moroni 10:7.

15. Mosiah 3:19; see also 2 Nephi 10:24–25.

16. See Alma 32:28, 34.

17. Matthew 18:21–22; emphasis added; see also Luke 17:1–4.

18. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:5–7; 25:3; 29:3; 31:5; 36:1; 50:36; 60:6–7; 61:2; 62:3; 64:1–4, 5–7, 15–17; 75:6–8; 82:1; 84:60–61; 90:1, 6; 108:1; 110:5; 112:3; 124:74–76, 78; 132:50.

19. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:5–7; 29:3; 60:6–7; 61:2; 62:3; 64:5–7; 84:60–61; 90:1; 110:5; 132:50.

20. Joseph Smith—History 1:28.

21. Doctrine and Covenants 64:2; emphasis added.

22. See 1 Nephi 20:9–11; Doctrine and Covenants 24:2; 50:41; 63:47; 108:1–8.

23. Doctrine and Covenants 64:3.

24. Doctrine and Covenants 64:7.

25. Doctrine and Covenants 1:31; see also verses 32–33; Alma 45:16.

26. Doctrine and Covenants 132:27; see also Matthew 12:31; Luke 12:10.

27. See Exodus 20:13; Mosiah 13:21; Doctrine and Covenants 132:19; Moses 5:31–36.

28. See Alma 39:5; Doctrine and Covenants 42:24–26.

29. See Doctrine and Covenants 42:22–26, 75–78, 80–82; 63:13–17; 76:103.

30. Doctrine and Covenants 82:3; see also John 15:22.

31. See Moroni 6:8.

32. See Mosiah 15:26.

33. See 1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 24:3–4; Proverbs 23:7; Matthew 15:18–20; Mark 7:20–23; Hebrews 3:12; 3 Nephi 12:19; Doctrine and Covenants 59:8; 64:34.

34. See Doctrine and Covenants 20:29–30; 121:37.

35. Doctrine and Covenants 117:11.

36. See Bible Dictionary, “Nicolaitans.”

37. See Revelation 2:6, 15.

38. Doctrine and Covenants 56:15.

39. See 2 Nephi 25:23; Doctrine and Covenants 138:4.

40. Moses 7:21.

41. Ether 12:27.

42. See John 15:22; Doctrine and Covenants 1:33; 82:3.

43. See Alma 41:5–6; 3 Nephi 9:20; Doctrine and Covenants 137:9.

44. See 1 Nephi 15:33; Alma 41:3–4; Doctrine and Covenants 137:9.

45. See Matthew 6:14–15; Doctrine and Covenants 64:8–10; 98:39–48.

46. *Preach My Gospel: A Guide to Missionary Service* (2004), 189.

47. Thomas S. Monson, “See Others as They May Become,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2012, 68, 69; emphasis added.

48. Doctrine and Covenants 38:10–11, 14; emphasis added.

49. Romans 3:23.

50. Doctrine and Covenants 62:1; see also Alma 7:12.

51. Doctrine and Covenants 61:39; emphasis added.

52. Alma 34:18; emphasis added; see also 2 Nephi 31:19; Alma 7:14.

53. See Helaman 13:11; Doctrine and Covenants 19:4, 13–21.

54. See Doctrine and Covenants 64:8–10.

55. Doctrine and Covenants 101:9; emphasis added; see also Doctrine and Covenants 82:1–7.

56. “Gently Raise the Sacred Strain,” *Hymns*, no. 146.

57. See Alma 34:15–17.