

Alma 42:1

1 Alma was in an interview with a doubter, his son Corianton. As you read the early parts of this interview, you will become sure that he had listened carefully to his son. Alma saw that Corianton had a question. Corianton doubted the justice of God; it seemed too severe because of his own sins. To those with unrepented sins, the truth always seems hard, so doubt is a natural defense

Henry B. Eyring, *To draw closer to God* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997], 149

Alma 42:2

2 Properly understood, it becomes apparent that the fall of Adam, is one of the greatest blessings ever given of God to mankind. It is the way and the means whereby the spirit children of the Father go forth from their celestial home to gain mortal and then immortal bodies. And it provides the way for the experiences, tests, and trials that prepare the faithful for eternal life. Is it any wonder, then, that Michael himself—who stood next to the Lord Jehovah in power, might, and dominion, when they both dwelt in the presence of the Father—is it any wonder that Michael was the one chosen to come here as Adam to make such glorious blessings available to the billions of his descendants who should be born on earth?

Bruce R. McConkie, *New Witness*, p. 87.

Alma 42:3

3 *Cherubim and a flaming sword*

“A *cherub* is an angel of some particular order or rank to whom specific duties and work are assigned” (McConkie, Bruce R. *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996, 124). *Cherubim* is the Hebrew plural of *cherub*. The beings who guarded the tree of life were “faithful personages belonging to this world who had not, at this time, received the privilege of partaking of mortality” (Smith, Joseph Fielding, *Answers to Gospel Question*, Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. 5 vols. Salt Lake City : Deseret Book, 1957—66, 2:97). While the presence of a flaming sword was evidence of divine protection of the tree of life after the Fall, the scriptures are silent regarding its nature and appearance.

The Bible states that God placed cherubim and a flaming sword “to keep the way of the tree of life,” but it does not explain why this was done (Gen. 3:24). The Book of Mormon provides this explanation and teaches how this act was essential to the plan of salvation. If Adam and Eve had been permitted to eat from the tree of life after their transgression, there would have been no death, contrary to God’s word. In addition, “our first parents” would have been “forever miserable, having no preparatory state,” or “time to prepare to meet God” (Alma 12:22—26) —“to repent and serve God” (Alma 42:2-5)—and “thus the plan of redemption would have been frustrated” (Alma 12:26).

Book of Mormon Reference Companion, ed. by Dennis L. Largey [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003], 182

4 *Cherubim* is the (Hebrew) plural of *cherub*, though it is used in the scriptures as a singular noun. “In the celestial hierarchy, cherubs are represented as spirits next in order to seraphs” (Webster’s Dictionary, 1828). Regarded as chief among their duties is that of guarding the holy place, or the place where God dwells.

Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L Millet, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991], 3:310-311.

Alma 42:3

5 Man had become God

Having partaken of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—that is, having obtained the capacity to distinguish between opposites, and being able now to understand the difference between good and evil—Adam had, on this matter, become as God. Thereafter, through the righteous exercise of agency, Adam could pursue a course that would eventually endow him with a fulness of the Father. “As to the fall,” Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “the scriptures set forth that there were in the Garden of Eden two trees. One was the tree of life, which figuratively refers to eternal life; the other was the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which figuratively refers to how and why and in

what manner mortality and all that appertains to it came into being.... Eve partook without full understanding; Adam partook knowing that unless he did so, he and Eve could not have children and fulfill the commandment they had received to multiply and replenish the earth.” (*New Witness*, p. 86.) Else Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “The account is speaking figuratively. What is meant by partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is that our first parents complied with whatever laws were involved so that their bodies would change from their state of paradisiacal immortality to a state of natural mortality.” (“Christ and the Creation,” *Ensign*, June 1982, p. 15.) Millet & McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Vol 3, p. 311.

Alma 42:3

6 *Live forever*

The thought would be more complete were it to read “and live forever *in his sins*.” It is not endless life that the Lord sought to prevent by placing the cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the tree of life; rather, it was endless life in an unrepentant state. Thus God in his mercy granted Adam “a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God.” *Ibid.* p.311

Alma 42:4

Probationary Time

7 God’s justice demanded that death accompany the violation of his command to Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But his mercy (and certainly his knowledge of the plan, for all things were done “in the wisdom of him who knoweth all things”) dictated that he delay the imposition of that penalty and that he put Adam and Eve on probation. In doing so, he allowed them time in mortality to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, accept it, repent of their transgression, and make claim upon the promised atonement of Jesus for the remission of their sins before the hour of their mandated death. “The days of the children of men were prolonged, according to the will of God, that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation, and their time was lengthened, according to the commandments which the Lord God gave unto the children of men,” Lehi taught. (2 Nephi 2:21-22).

Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant*, p. 208

8 The main purpose of earth life is to allow our spirits, which existed before the world was, to be united with our bodies for a time of great opportunity in mortality. The association of the two together has given us the privilege of growing, developing, and maturing as only we can with spirit and body united. With our bodies, we pass through a certain amount of trial in what is termed a probationary state of our existence. This is a time of learning and testing to prove ourselves worthy of eternal opportunities. It is all part of a divine plan our Father has for His children.

L. Tom Perry, in conference report, Apr. 1989, 16; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 13-14.

9 The plan of salvation presented to and accepted by us in our premortal state includes a probationary period on earth, during which we experience opposites, make choices, learn the consequences thereof, and prepare to return to the presence of God. Experiencing adversity is an essential part of the process. Knowing this, we elected to come into mortality. (See 2 Nephi 2:11-16.)

Ronald E. Poelman, In Conference Report, Apr. 1989, 29; or *Ensign*, May 1989, 23.

Alma 42:510 *Plan of Salvation*

See "Teaching Our Children the Plan of Salvation," *Ensign*, September 2001, p. 32-39

- 11 How glorious is the plan of salvation, inaugurated before the foundation of the world for the salvation of men. Adam was sent to start the race, and through doing so, it became necessary for him to transgress a law, to bring death, or mortality, into the world. That made it necessary for the coming of Jesus Christ to redeem us from Adam's transgression, or the mortal death, and through the mercy of our Father in heaven, and His Son Jesus Christ, through that atonement we likewise are granted redemption from our own sins on condition of our repentance.

Joseph Fielding Smith, Conference Report, April 1944, 49

Alma 42:712 *Cut off*

Having been driven from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve now commence their mortal probation. The intimacy they once enjoyed with God is now lost to them; they have left "father and mother" and are now to "cleave" unto each other (see Genesis 2:24). They face the surety of death and the struggle to overcome the temptations of the flesh, that they might be worthy of the directions of the Spirit. In temporal death their spirits and bodies will separate, the body returning to the dust whence it was taken and the spirit being consigned to the world of disembodied souls. Spiritual death is their separation from the divine presence, alienation from the author of righteousness.

Millet & McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, Vol 3, p. 312.

Alma 42:813 *Plan of Salvation*

How glorious is the plan of salvation, inaugurated before the foundation of the world for the salvation of men. Adam was sent to start the race, and through doing so, it became necessary for him to transgress a law, to bring death, or mortality, into the world. That made it necessary for the coming of Jesus Christ to redeem us from Adam's transgression, or the mortal death, and through the mercy of our Father in heaven, and His Son Jesus Christ, through that atonement we likewise are granted redemption from our own sins or condition of our repentance.

Joseph Fielding Smith in Conference Report, April 1944, 49

- 14 In obedience, there is joy and peace unspotted, ... and as God has designed our happiness—and the happiness of all His creations, he never has—He never will institute an ordinance or give a commandment to His people that is not calculated in its nature to promote that happiness which He has designed, and which will not end in the greatest amount of good and glory to those who become the recipients of his laws and ordinances.

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, comp. by Joseph Fielding Smith, [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 256-257.

- 15 Divine justice assures that there are no loopholes through which the not-fully-worthy would slip undeservedly into the celestial kingdom, where they would not be fully happy anyway. The plan of happiness is carefully gauged, blessing all, but especially those who have "faith unto repentance."

Neal A. Maxwell, *One More Strain of Praise* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999), 39.

- 16 The plan cannot bring true happiness to anyone whose life is grossly inconsistent with its standards... It has no place of honor for one too concerned with losing his place in the secular synagogue (see John 12:42-43.... Believers in the plan are not automatically immune to the consuming cares of the world... Some of our present circumstances may reflect previous agreements, now forgotten, but once freely made. The plan always points the way, but does not always smooth the way.
Neal A. Maxwell, in Conference Report, Apr. 1983 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1984], 29-30.
- 17 In the plan of happiness, the Great Shepherd Jesus, will neither drive nor even herd us along the straight and narrow path. Doing such would be against God's agency-drenched plan. Instead, exemplifying and beckoning, Jesus says, "Come, follow me" (Luke 18:22), the very words and the manner of a true Shepherd....
Meanwhile, strange, is it not, how we are willing to settle for so much less? We are like an eager child at a candy store who will settle for just "one of these and one of those," when the Owner desires to give us the whole store (D&C 84:38).
Neal A. Maxwell, *Whom the Lord Loveth* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003], 73-74
- 18 You have a choice. You can wring your hands and be consumed with concern for the future or choose to use the counsel the Lord has given to live with peace and happiness in a world awash with evil....
Now the brighter side. Despite pockets of evil, the world overall is majestically beautiful, filled with many good and sincere people. God has provided a way to live in this world and not be contaminated by the degrading pressures evil agents spread throughout it. You can live a virtuous, productive, righteous life by following the plan of protection created by your Father in Heaven: His plan of happiness. It is contained in the scriptures and in the inspired declarations of His prophets....
Our Father knew of our day. He prepared the scriptures and provided continuing divine guidance to sustain us. That help will assure that you can live with peace and happiness amid increasing evil.
Richard G. Scott, *Ensign*, May 2004 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004], 100-101.
- 19 **Alma 42:12**
This fallen state
Adam brought the fallen condition, mortality, through partaking of the forbidden fruit. All men and women are subject to this condition. All. Jehovah spoke to Adam: "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" (Moses 6:55). Robert L. Millet has written: "No, of course we do not believe with Calvin, in the moral depravity of men and women. No, we do not believe with Luther, that man, because of his carnality and depravity, does not even have the power to choose good over evil. And we do not believe that children are born in sin, that they inherit the so-called sin of Adam either through sexual union or by birth. Rather, children are *conceived* in sin: meaning first, that they are conceived into a world of sin, and second, that conception is the vehicle by which the effects of the Fall (not the original transgression, which God has forgiven) are transmitted to Adam's posterity. To say that we are not punished for the transgression is not so say that we are not subject to and affected by it.... Adam's fallen nature is passed on to his children and thereby from generation to generation. Thus sin is implanted in man's nature at conception, just as death is implanted at the same time. Both of these—death and sin—are present only in seed form at conception, and therefore a child is neither dead nor sinful when born. Death and sin do, however, come to pass as a result of man's nature as he grows up. Sin comes naturally, just as does death." (*Life in Christ*, pp. 24-25.)
This is what we call the fall of man. Adam, and thus all of us as his children, were freed from whatever "original guilt" might once have been as a result of Adam's transgression (see Moses 6:53-54). But what of our own fall? Gerald N. Lund has written: "If we know good from evil and then sin (which, according to Paul, all men do), then we must talk about a second fall. This is not the fall of Adam. This is *one's own personal fall*. This fall, which our own,

not Adam's, transgression brings about, requires redemption as surely as mankind needed redemption from the consequences of Adam's fall. We'll term this the 'fall of me'... Now, since we have no one to blame for this except ourselves, our redemption becomes conditional upon our actions. This is what Lehi meant [2 Nephi 2:7] when he said that the sacrifice that the Messiah offered to satisfy the ends of the law is viable only for those with a broken heart and a contrite spirit."

Millet & McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol 3, p.314.

Alma 42:13-31

20 *Justice, Mercy, Atonement*

It is also necessary that men should have the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in God in order to exercise faith in him unto life and salvation. For without the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in the Deity, men could not have confidence sufficient to place themselves under his guidance and direction. For they would be filled with fear and doubt lest the Judge of all the earth would not do right, and thus fear or doubt existing in the mind would preclude the possibility of the existence of the attribute justice in the Deity is fairly planted in the mind, it leaves no room for doubt to get into the heart; and the mind is enabled to cast itself upon the Almighty without doubt, and with the most unshaken confidence, believing that the judge of all the earth will do right.

And again, it is equally important that men should have the idea of the existence of the attribute mercy in the Deity in order to exercise faith in him for life and salvation. For without the idea of the existence of this attribute in the Deity, the spirits of the Saints would faint in the midst of the tribulations, afflictions, and persecutions which they have to endure for righteousness' sake. But when the idea of the existence of this attribute is once established in the mind, it gives life and energy to the spirits of the Saints, who believe then that the mercy of God will be poured out upon them in the midst of their afflictions, and that he will be compassionate to them in their sufferings, and that the mercy of God will lay hold of them and secure them in the arms of his love, so that they will receive a full reward for all the sufferings.

Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective*, ed. Larry E. Dahl, and Charles D. Tate, Jr., (1990), 78-79).

21 Justice requires that God must be a God of order and that he must be just and impartial. Mercy agrees with justice; however, mercy introduces the possibility of vicarious payment of the laws that have been transgressed. The law of mercy paraphrased as follows: Whenever a law is broken, a payment (or atonement) must be made; however the person does not need to make payment if he can find someone who is both able and willing to make payment. Note the law of mercy insists the demands of justice be met fully.

Daniel H. Ludlow, *Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon*, pp. 176-177

22 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. . . . 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. . . . By itself, justice is uncompromising. The justice of God holds each of us responsible for our own transgressions and automatically imposes the penalty. . . . 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. . . . 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.

Dallin H. Oaks, Address given to CES Religious Educators, Temple Square Assembly Hall, Feb. 7, 1992

23 It was necessary for the justice of a God to be meted out in order for the mercy of a God to be extended; as the fall is the father of the atonement, so justice paves the way for mercy.

Robert Millet, *Studies in Scripture Book of Mormon*, p. 62

Alma 42:13

Justice

24 That which conforms to the mind and will of God and is righteous and proper before him is *just*. A just punishment, for instance, is one that is deserved because the recipient violated the law, thus meriting the particular penalty that always accompanies violation of that law. *Justice* deals with the unbending, invariable results that always and ever flow from the same causes. It carries a connotation of righteousness, fairness, impartiality. It embraces the principle and practice of just dealing, of conformity to a course of perfect rectitude, or adherence to a standard of complete integrity.

Justice is one of attributes of God. "Publish the name of the Lord," Moses proclaimed, "ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, *just* and right is he." (Deut. 32:3-4.) "*Justice* and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face," the psalmist wrote. (Ps. 89:14.) "There is no God else beside me," the Lord says, "a *just* God and a Saviour." (Isa. 45:21; Zeph. 3:5; Zech. 9:9; Rev. 15:: 3-4....

Mercy

In the gospel sense, mercy consists in our Lord's forbearance, on certain specified conditions, from imposing punishments that, except for his grace and goodness, would be the just reward of man.

Because mercy is an attribute of Deity (Ex. 33:19; Rom. 9:15-18; 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 2:4; 1 per. 1:3), men are thereby enabled to have faith in him unto life and salvation....

No cry of thanksgiving and relief seems to come more gratefully from the prophetic voice than the comforting exclamation, "*His mercy endureth for ever!*" (1 Chron. 16:34, 41; 2 Chron. 5:13; 7:3, 6; Ezra 3:11; Ps. 106:1; 107:1; 118:1-4; 136; Jer. 33:11.) Certainly his mercy is manifest in all his doings—his creative enterprises and his hand-dealings in all ages with all people. (Ps 136.)

The atoning sacrifice of our Lord, upon which all things rest, came because of his infinite mercy. (D&C 29:1.) Through his condescension, grace and mercy he has visited the children of men and given great promises to them. (2 Ne. 4:26; 9:53.)....

Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966], 483-86.

25 I believe that our Heavenly Father wants to save every one of his children. I do not think he intends to shut any of us off because of some slight transgression, some slight failure to observe some rule or regulation.... I believe that in his justice and mercy, he will give us the maximum reward for our acts, give us all that he can give, and in the reverse, I believe that he will impose upon us the minimum penalty which it is possible for him to impose.

J. Reuben Clark jr., in *Conference Report*, 30 Sept. 1955 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1955], 24

26 All of us have made wrong turns along the way. I believe the kind and merciful God, whose children we are, will judge us as lightly as He can for the wrongs that we have done and give us the maximum blessing for the good that we do.

James E. Faust, *Ensign*, Nov. 1996 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996], 53.

27 Mercy, detached from Justice, grows unmerciful. That is the important paradox. As there are plants which flourish only in mountain soil, so it appears that Mercy will flower only when it grows in the crannies of the rock of Justice.

C.S. Lewis, "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment" [1949], in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1970], 294; as quoted in Neal A Maxwell, *One More Strain of Praise* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999], 8

28 One thing we should remember is that the Lord does not punish us for our sins. He simply withholds his blessings and we punish ourselves. The scriptures tell us again and again that the wicked are punished by the wicked. A simple illustration can show how easily that is done. If mother would tell me not to touch a hot stove for it would burn and hurt me, she would only be stating a law. If I should forget or deliberately touch that hot stove, I would be burned. I could cry and complain of my hurts, but who would be punishing me? Would it be mother—or the hot stove? I would be punishing myself. Even after my finger healed, I would have to remember the law, for every time I would touch that hot stove I would be burned, again and again until I could learn to obey the law. It was and is the law, and justice would have to be done. This illustration, however, disregards the important element of mercy.

Theodore M. Burton, "The Meaning of Repentance," BYU Devotional Talk, 26 Mar. 1985 [Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1985], 4.

29 The justice and mercy of God will have been so demonstrably perfect that at the Final Judgment there will be no complaints, including from those who once questioned what God had allotted in the mortal framework (see 2 Nephi 9:14-15; Alma 5:15-19; 12:3-14; 42:23-26, 30).

Neal A. Maxwell, in Conference Report, Apr, 2000, 92; or *Ensign*, May 2000, 74.

30 I once wondered if those who refuse to repent but who then satisfy the law of justice by paying for their own sins are then worthy to enter the celestial kingdom. The answer is no. The entrance requirements for celestial life are simply higher than merely satisfying the law of justice. For that reason, paying for our sins will not bear the same fruit as repenting of our sins. Justice is a law of balance and order and it must be satisfied, either through our payment or his. But if we decline the Savior's invitation to let him carry our sins, and then satisfy justice by ourselves, we will not yet have experienced the complete rehabilitation that can occur through a combination of divine assistance and genuine repentance. Working together, those forces have the power permanently to change our hearts and our lives, preparing us for celestial life.

Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989], 7-8.

Alma 42:13

31 *God would cease to be God*

God cannot and will not cease to be God. His title, his status, and his exalted position are forever fixed and immutable. Nor need the Saints of God spend a particle of a second worrying and fretting about the Almighty falling from grace. Joseph Smith explained in the Lectures on Faith (lecture 4) that for the Saints to do so is to err in doctrine as to the true nature of God and thus fall short of that dynamic faith which leads to life and salvation. Alma's hypothetical case is just that—purely hypothetical. He is arguing toward the impossible, the absurd, to emphasize the logical certainty of the principle that mercy cannot rob justice. It is as if Alma had said: "It is as ridiculous to suppose that mercy can rob justice and that men and women can break the laws of God." In fact, Alma concludes, "God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement." (Alma 42:23).

Robert L. Millet, *Life in Christ*, p. 78

Alma 42:16**32** *Repentance and Punishment*

Alma Bluntly told his wayward son that “repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment.” The punishment may, for the most part, consist of the torment we inflict upon ourselves. It may be the loss of privilege or progress.... We are punished by our sins, if not for them.

Boyd K. Packer, *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, p. 19

33 There can be no forgiveness without real and total repentance, and there can be no repentance without punishment. This is as eternal as is the soul.... It is so easy to let our sympathies carry us out of proportion; and when man has committed sin, he must suffer. It is an absolute requirement.

Spencer W. Kimball, *Ensign*, May 1975, 78. (See also insights for Alma 36:11-13.

Alma 42:18**34** *Remorse of Conscience*

It is my purpose to ease the pain of those who suffer from the very unpleasant feeling of guilt. I feel like the doctor who begins his treatment by saying, “Now, this may hurt a little....”

Every one of us has at least tasted the pain of conscience which follows our mistakes.

John said, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us [1 John 1:8]. Then he said it more strongly: “If we say that we have not sinned, we make [the Lord] a liar, and his word is not in us” [1 John 1:10].

All of us sometime, and some of us much of the time, suffer remorse of conscience from things we did wrong or things left undone. That feeling of guilt is to the spirit what pain is to the physical body....

We all make mistakes. Sometimes we harm ourselves and seriously injure others in ways that we alone cannot repair. We break things that we alone cannot fix. It is then in our nature to feel guilt and humiliation and suffering, which we alone cannot cure. That is when the healing power of the Atonement will help.

The Lord Said, “Behold, I God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent [D&C 19:16].

Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report, Apr. 2001, 27-28; or *Ensign*, May 2001, 22-23.

35 How wonderful that God should endow us with this sensitive yet strong guide we call a conscience! Someone has aptly remarked that “conscience is a celestial spark which God has put into every man for the purpose of saving his soul.” Certainly it is the instrument which awakens the soul to consciousness of sin, spurs a person to make up his mind to adjust, 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. To be sorry is an approach, to abandon the act of error is a beginning, but until one’s conscience has been sufficiently stirred to cause him to move in the matter, so long as there are excuses and rationalizations, one has hardly begun his approach to forgiveness. This is what Alma meant in telling his son Corianton that “none but the truly penitent are saved.” (Alma 42:24)

Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*[1969], 152.

Alma 42:23**36** The only judge who can render a righteous judgment will be the Infinite Judge who knows all things from before the beginning of man upon the earth, even to the end of man. He will take things into His view, and the judgment that will be rendered, you may be sure, will be a righteous judgment, where mercy tempers justice, and yet justice has its part. If that were not so, it would make mockery of the laws that God prepared for us to obey if we are to inherit His glory.

The Teachings of Harold B. Lee (1996), 66.

37 The magnificent expression of His love came in His death, when He gave His life as a sacrifice for all men. That Atonement, wrought in unspeakable pain, became the greatest event of history, an act of grace for which men gave nothing but which brought the assurance of the Resurrection to all who have or would walk the earth.

No other act in all of human history compares with it. Nothing that has ever happened can match it. Totally unselfish and with unbounded love for all mankind, it became an unparalleled act of mercy for the whole human race.

Then with the Resurrection that first Easter morn came the triumphal declaration of immortality. Well was Paul able to declare, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22). He not only granted the blessing of the Resurrection to all, but opened the way to eternal life to those who observe His teachings and commandments.

In Conference Report, Oct. 1999, 92.

Alma 42:23

38 It is . . . necessary, in order to the exercise of faith in God unto life and salvation, that men should have the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in him; for without the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in the Deity, men could not have confidence sufficient to place themselves under his guidance and direction; for they would be filled with fear and doubt lest the judge of all the earth would not do right, and thus fear or doubt, existing in the mind, would preclude the possibility of the exercise of faith in him for life and salvation. But when the idea of the existence of the attribute justice in the Deity is fairly planted in the mind, it leaves no room for doubt to get into the heart, and the mind is enabled to cast itself upon the Almighty without fear and without doubt, and with the most unshaken confidence, believing that the Judge of all the earth will do right.

Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 4:13

39 Exalted beings simply do not apostatize! They do not slip! It is contrary to their divine nature to lie or cheat or be impartial. God is not dependent on others for his Godhood, nor can he be impeached. Nor need the Saints of God spend a particle of a second worrying and fretting about the Almighty falling from grace. For members of the Church to do so, in fact—as the Prophet has suggested—is to err in doctrine as to the true nature of God and thus fall short of that dynamic faith which leads to life and salvation. Alma's hypothetical case is just that—purely hypothetical. He is arguing toward the impossible to demonstrate the logical certainty of his position—that mercy cannot rob justice. It is as if Alma had said, "To suppose that one can break the laws of God with impunity; to suppose that one can live a life of sin and have the atonement of Christ—the mercy of the Lord—rob justice of its due, is to suppose that which cannot be. It is as absurd as to suppose that God could cease to be God!" Truly, Alma explained, "God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement. . . . 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 42:23-24; emphasis added.)

Robert Millett, *Studies in Scriptures Book of Mormon*, Pt 2 p. 66

Alma 42:24

40 *Truly penitent are saved*

There are many people who seem to rely solely on the Lord's mercy rather than on accomplishing their own repentance. One woman rather flippantly said, "The Lord knows my intents and that I'd like to give up my bad habits. He will understand and forgive me." But the scriptures will not bear this out. The Lord may temper justice with mercy, but he will never supplant it. Mercy can never replace justice. God is *merciful*, but he is also *just*. The Savior's atonement represents the mercy extended. Because of this atonement, all men can be saved. Most men can be exalted.

Many have greatly misunderstood the place of mercy in the forgiveness program. Its role is not to give great blessings without effort. Were it not for the atonement of Christ, the shedding of his blood, the assumption by proxy of our sins, man could never be forgiven and cleansed. Justice and mercy work hand in hand. Having offered mercy to us in the overall redemption, the Lord must now let justice rule, for he cannot save us in our sins, as Amulek explained (Alma 11:37).

Perhaps the greatest scriptural exposition on the respective roles of mercy and justice, and God's position in it all, is that of Alma to his son Corianton. It is important for all of us to understand this concept (President Kimball quotes Alma 42:22-25).

"There should be no license for sin" said the Prophet, "but mercy should go hand in hand with reproof." And again, God does not look on sin with allowance, but when men have sinned, there must be allowance made for them. (*Documentary History of the Church*, vol. 5:24).

Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, [1969], 358-59.

Alma 42:25

41 The judges at the gate will know for certain the formula, the records, the spirit, the true deserts. The Book of Life (see Revelations 20:12) will show the earthly activities of all of us, and the book of the angels will give the entire story of every man and what he did in the light and in the shadows, in the open and in the corners, and all that is said in the secret places and from the house tops, all that was thought and expressed, whether good or bad. There will be no escape. The honest judge will give full value to all for their good works and will not overlook the other.

God is just. I know that every man will enjoy every blessing which he has earned and I know that every man will receive no blessing through mercy as that word is often connotated. Justice will be tempered with mercy but not replaced by it. I am positive that no man will ever be judged without opportunity, blessed beyond his deserts, nor punished for something for which he was not responsible....

On earth there are many apparent injustices, when man must judge man and when uncontrollable situations seem to bring undeserved disaster, but in the judgment of God there will be no injustice and no soul will receive any blessing, reward, or glory which he has not earned, and no soul will be punished through deprivation or otherwise for anything of which he was not guilty.

The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball (1982), 46-47.

42 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 gives us the blessings which we have duly earned.

The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball (1982), 70.

43 The Lord's program is unchangeable. His laws are immutable. They will not be modified. Your opinions or mine do not make any difference and do not alter the laws. Many of the world think that eventually the Lord will be merciful and give to them *unearned* blessings. Mercy cannot rob justice. College professors will not give you a doctorate degree for a few weeks of cursory work in the university, nor can the Lord be merciful at the expense of justice. In this program, which is infinitely greater, we will each receive what we merit. Do not take any chances whatever....

God will not be mocked. His laws are immutable. True repentance is rewarded by forgiveness, but sin brings the sting of death.

The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball (1982), 150-151.

Alma 42:29

44 Alma didn't promise that Corianton would forget. He taught him how to live with his memories, productively, humbly, continually appreciative for the mercy and long-suffering and forgiveness of God. "You'll remember your sins" we can almost hear Alma saying. "You probably won't ever forget. But remember in the right way for the right reasons."

Marion D. Hanks, *Improvement Era*, Mar. 1966, p. 246

45 Alma desired that his son experience appropriate guilt—no more than was requisite, but surely no less than is needful to bring about change.

Robert Millet: as quoted in *Studies in scripture*, ed. by Kent P. Jackson [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987], 8:51

46 Sometimes even after confession and penalties the most difficult part of repentance is to forgive oneself. President Joseph Fielding Smith, a man whom I love—great friend, told of a woman who had repented of immoral conduct and was struggling to find her way. She asked him what she should do now. In turn, he asked her to read to him from the Old Testament the account of Sodom and Gomorrah, of Lot and of Lot's wife who was turned to a pillar of salt (see Gen. 19:26). Then he asked her what lesson did those verses hold for her. She answered, "The Lord will destroy those who are wicked." "Not so," President Smith told this repentant woman, "The lesson for *you* is 'Don't look back!'"

Boyd K. Packer, *BYU Fireside*, 29 Mar 1992.

47 Guilt should lead to repentance. Unfortunately, guilt can be like a two-edged sword—functional or dysfunctional. Satan can pervert this divine tool by tempting the sinner to become discouraged rather than motivated.... Guilt, as a divinely designed consequence of sin, is meant to impel individuals to come unto Christ and repent.

Philip Allred, *The Book of Mormon: The Foundation of Our Faith*, The 28th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999], 26.

48 At times the statement is made, "I never can forgive [this person or that person]." Such an attitude is destructive to an individual's well-being. It can canker the soul and ruin one's life. In other instances, an individual can forgive another but cannot forgive himself. Such a situation is even more *destructive*. Early in my ministry as a member of the Council of the Twelve, I took to President Hugh B. Brown the experience of a fine person who... could not show mercy to himself. He could forgive others but not himself.... President Brown suggested that I visit with that individual and counsel him along these lines.... "Tell that man that he should not persist in remembering that which the Lord has said He is willing to forget" (D&C 64:10). Such counsel will help to cleanse the soul and renew the spirit of any who applies it.

Thomas S. Monson, *Ensign*, May 1995 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995], 59-60.

49 Now if you are one who cannot forgive yourself for serious past transgressions—even when a judge in Israel has assured that you have properly repented—if you feel compelled to continually condemn yourself and suffer by frequently recalling the details of past errors, I plead with all of my soul that you ponder this statement of the Savior:

"He who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.

"By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins.... He will confess them and forsake them" (D&C 58:42-43).

To continue to suffer when there been proper repentance is not prompted by the Savior but the master of deceit, whose goal is to bind and enslave you. Satan will press you to continue to relive the details of past mistakes, knowing that such thoughts make forgiveness seem unattainable. In this way Satan attempts to tie strings to the mind and body so that he can manipulate you like a puppet.

I testify that when a bishop or stake president has confirmed that your repentance is sufficient, know that your obedience has allowed the Atonement of Jesus Christ to satisfy the demands of justice for the laws you have broken.

Therefore, you are now free. Please believe it. To continually suffer the distressing effects of sin after adequate repentance, while not intended, is to deny the efficacy of the Savior's Atonement in your behalf.

Richard G. Scott, in Conference Report, Oct. 2004 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2004], 17.

50 To me, none of the many approaches to teaching repentance falls more short than the well-intentioned suggestion that "although a nail may be removed from a wooden post, there will forever be a hole in that post."

We know that repentance (the removal of that nail, if you will) can be a very long and painful and difficult task... But where repentance *is* possible and its requirements are faithfully pursued and completed, there is no "hole left in the post" for the bold reason that it is no longer the same post. It is a new post. We can start again, utterly clean, with a new will and a new way of life.

Jeffrey R. Holland, *The Book of Mormon: It Begins with a Family* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983], 96-97.

51 If the time comes when you have done all that you can to repent of your sin.... If it be something that will affect your standing in the Church and you have gone to the proper authorities, then you will want that confirming answer as to whether or not the Lord has accepted of you. In your soul-searching, if you seek for and you find that peace of conscience, by that token you may know that the Lord has accepted of your repentance. Satan would have you think otherwise and sometimes persuade you that now having made one mistake, you might go on and on with no turning back. That is one of the great falsehoods. The miracle of forgiveness is available to all of those who turn from their evil doings and return no more, because the Lord has said in a revelation to us in our day "...go your way and sin no more; but unto that soul who sinneth [meaning again] shall the former sins return, saith the Lord your God" (D&C 82:7). Have that in mind, all of you who may be troubled with a burden of sin.

Harold B. Lee, in Conference Report, Apr. 1973 [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1973], 177-178.

Alma 42:30

52 *Bring you down to humility*

"Heaven pity a man who is unconscious of a fault! Pity him also who is ignorant of his ignorance! Neither one is the road to salvation" (David O. McKay).

When we have become aware of the gravity of our sin, we can condition our minds to follow such processes as will rid us of the effects of the sin. Alma tried to convey this to Corianton when he said: "... Let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which will bring you down to repentance.... Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point..." Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (1969), 151.

Alma 42:31

53 *With truth*

What is meant by the charge to teach the gospel "with truth?" Our word *true* is derived from the Old English *treowe*, which meant "faithful," "trustworthy," or "loyal." Thus, to teach the gospel with truth is to be faithful to the message; it is to be a trustworthy servant; it is not to take thought as to what people want to hear or to be concerned with what might give offense; it is to deliver the message as the message has been given to us in the scriptures and by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Millet & McConkie, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, vol 3, p. 321.

Alma

54 *Conclusion*

Elder Orson F. Whitney held out this hope for the parents of wandering or wayward children: "You parents of the willful and the wayward: Don't give them up. Don't cast them off. They are not utterly lost. The shepherd will find his sheep. They were his before they were yours—long before he entrusted them to your care; and you cannot begin to love them as he loves them. They have but strayed in ignorance from the Path of Right, and God is merciful to

ignorance. Only the fulness of knowledge brings the fulness of accountability. Our Heavenly Father is far more merciful, infinitely more charitable, than even the best of his servants, and the Everlasting Gospel is mightier in power to save than our narrow finite minds can comprehend.” (CR, April 1929, p. 110.) In that same spirit President J. Reuben Clark Jr. observed: I feel that [the Lord] will give the punishment which is the very least that our transgression will justify.... I believe that when it comes to making the rewards for our good conduct, he will give the maximum that is possible to give.” (From “As Ye Sow...” address delivered at Brigham Young University, 3 May 1955.)

This story (Alma 39-42) points up a deeply significant principle—the value of teaching doctrine. One perusing these chapters might be prone to ask: “The boy has a moral problem; why preach to him? Why spend so much time discussing the spirit world, resurrection, judgment, the law of restoration, and the mercy and justice of God? Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained: “The foundation upon which we build our whole Church system is one of testimony and faith and conversion. It is our theology; it is the doctrine God has given us in this day; it is the restored and revealed principles of eternal truth—these are the things that give us the ability to operate our programs and build houses of salvation.” (Address at a Regional Representatives Seminar, 3 April 1981, typescript pp. 9-10; cited in Mark L. McConkie, ed., *Doctrines of the Restoration*, pp. 226-27.) Or, as Elder Boyd K. Packer testified: “True doctrine, understood, changes attitudes and behavior. The study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than a study of behavior will improve behavior. Preoccupation with unworthy behavior can lead to unworthy behavior. That is why we stress so forcefully the study of the doctrines of the gospel.” (CR, October 1986, p.20.)
Ibid, p. 320