

6 The Hope of Loved Ones

Bruce H. Porter

Those who believe they have eternally lost a loved one because of apostasy from the church and the gospel need to understand the concept of *agency* and how it works. Almost all of the emotional pain a person goes through in this life is because someone else is exercising his or her agency. Some teach that it was Satan's plan to stop all from sinning, but in reality God's plan of salvation was to guarantee that everyone could sin if they choose. The plan of Satan was to destroy the agency of man, which was an evil plan that made him unable to remain in the presence of God.

3 Wherefore, because that Satan rebelled against me, and sought to destroy the agency of man which I, the Lord God, had given him, and also, that I should give unto him mine own power; by the power of mine Only Begotten, I caused that he should be cast down (Moses 4:3).

When children are in the home, a parent can teach, discipline, and even force children to do things against their will. Once children are out of the home and on their own, the parents' role changes from *teacher* to *counselor*—and then, only when the children ask for it. Parental control has a time limit. Everyone has agency and eventually every child can and will make their own choices, decisions and actions.

One primary focus of the church is to do work for the dead in the context of providing the ordinances of salvation and exaltation. This activity exists because of the revelations received through Joseph Smith, found in the Doctrine and Covenants. Doing work for the dead is a valid endeavor because the spirit world is a continuation of our probationary state, where all will have the opportunity to work out their own salvation. If the spirit world were not a continuation of this probationary state, then work for the dead would be pointless.

Learning, faith and repentance continues beyond the veil. A perfect understanding of the Gospel and plan of salvation is required before one can be judged. Working out our salvation requires a perfect knowledge and understanding. Joseph Smith taught that a "person could gain salvation no faster than they gain knowledge" (*TPJS*, p. 217). A *perfect knowledge* is a requirement for true agency to exist.

All the spirits who have and will come to this earth could not make a choice in the council of heaven without first knowing how good *and* bad this life could be. Every spirit would be required to understand *perfectly* the potential of salvation and redemption as well as what it would *feel* like to suffer sicknesses, and illnesses such as cancer, leukemia, all manner of diseases, all physical abnormalities and pain. All spirits would have to know exactly what the emotional pain would be like to lose a spouse, or a child both physically and spiritually before a choice could be made to come to this earth. (That perfect knowledge could come from a loving God even without participating in the physical experience, for "all things are possible with God" especially in the environment of God.) Perhaps it was not required to know what specific experiences each individual would participate in during life, but every spirit *must have known and understood* the pain of life and how bad it *could* be. If this were not true, one could cry "foul" or "timeout"

declaring that if they had known how bad it was going to be on earth they would have made a different choice. A *perfect* knowledge and *perfect* understanding of how bad life could be, would be required before an intelligent choice could be made based on agency. If this were not the case, then the ‘agency’ of mankind would have been compromised by God Himself, for it is the same exercise of agency for which Satan and his followers were cast out.

An individual who understands this perspective receives power and hope over mortality as they awaken to the realization that they don’t have trials and tribulations—they have a life. This life, with its limitations and infirmities of body, mind, and spirit, were perfectly understood, and all spirits that receive a physical body willingly agreed to participate in this painful mortality. Understanding the potentials of futurity (exaltation) and the pain and suffering of life is the only way that the individual spirit could make an intelligent, informed choice to participate in the plan of salvation and happiness. Understanding this, God could never be blamed for the grievances and sufferings of mortality.

Likewise, the casting out of Satan and the third part of the spirits that were to come to this earth could not take place unless and until they understood *perfectly* the consequences of their actions and choices. Again, if this were not true, their punishment would be unjust, because their agency would have been compromised and God would cease to be God.

Agency's requirements apply to the hereafter as well. Once dead, if an individual spirit were to be judged or placed in any kingdom without first having a perfect understanding of the Atonement, the plan of salvation and the gospel of Jesus Christ, without any misunderstanding or misconception, their agency would be compromised and the judgment unjust. Therefore, every spirit must know and understand perfectly of Christ and his gospel before making a choice to accept or reject the plan (this is the reason why we do work for the dead). Having a perfect knowledge of the gospel is no guarantee one will choose to be redeemed, but a perfect knowledge is required to make a choice. As the pre-mortal Lord tells Alma: “And then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, that I am their Redeemer; but they would not be redeemed.” (Mosiah 26:26). The perfect knowledge is first required to make an informed choice for agency to exist.

This complete and perfect understanding and comprehension of the gospel, plan of salvation and the Atonement cannot occur in mortality (Moses 1:5). Even those who understand the gospel on earth will still need to learn more on the other side of the veil. A perfect understanding is impossible here no matter the education, station or faith in life, and because of this Alma declares: “there *must needs be* space (time) betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection” (Alma 40:6, see also verses 9, and 21). This space or time is required so that all in the spirit world may come to a perfect understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ without any misconception. This, that all may be judged with a perfect knowledge and bright recollection so that their agency will not be compromised and their judgment will not be unjust.

30 But behold, from among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, *even to all the spirits of men*; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead.

31 And the chosen messengers went forth to declare the acceptable day of the Lord and proclaim liberty to the captives who were bound, *even unto all who would repent of their sins and receive the gospel.*

32 Thus was the gospel preached to those who had died in their sins, *without a knowledge of the truth, or in transgression, having rejected the prophets.*

33 These were taught faith in God, repentance from sin, vicarious baptism for the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands,

34 *And all other principles of the gospel that were necessary for them to know in order to qualify themselves that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.*

35 And so *it was made known among the dead, both small and great, the unrighteous as well as the faithful,* that redemption had been wrought through the sacrifice of the Son of God upon the cross. (D&C 138)

This time "that must needs be" between death and the resurrection in the spirit world is required so that every spirit might use their agency to learn the gospel and develop the character that is capable of abiding in the glory and kingdom in which they will seek and be satisfied for eternity. It is not a timed test. The exaltation bus doesn't leave at 4:00 pm on Thursday. The process of changing our character takes as long as it takes. The individual will progress as fast as they choose to receive and be obedient to the light and truth available to them.

29 And this to the intent that whosoever will believe might be saved, and that whosoever will not believe, a righteous judgment might come upon them; and also if they are condemned they bring upon themselves their own condemnation.

30 And now remember, remember, my brethren, that whosoever perisheth, perisheth unto himself; and whosoever doeth iniquity, doeth it unto himself; for behold, ye are free; ye are permitted to act for yourselves; for behold, God hath given unto you a knowledge and he hath made you free.

31 He hath given unto you that ye might know good from evil, and he hath given unto you that ye might choose life or death; and ye can do good and be restored unto that which is good, or have that which is good restored unto you; or ye can do evil, and have that which is evil restored unto you. (Helaman 14:29-31)

With a perfect knowledge of the gospel's plan of salvation, all will be resurrected to the glory that they have chosen and prepared themselves for, no matter the kingdom: "...thus they stand or fall; for behold, they are their own judges, whether to do good or do evil" (Alma 41:7).

32 ...nevertheless, they shall return again to their own place, *to enjoy that which they are willing to receive, because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received.*

33 For what doth it profit a man if a gift is bestowed upon him, and he receive not the gift? Behold, he rejoices not in that which is given unto him, neither rejoices in him who is the giver of the gift. (D&C 88:32, 33)

As a parent I want my children to be as happy as they can be. That will be where they choose to be, not where I want them to be. Hell is where a person doesn't belong (and that could be the Celestial Kingdom); heaven is where one desires to be.

4 Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell. (Mormon 9:4)

Once resurrected, possessed of the characters created by personal agency and the kingdom of glory they have chosen, all will be totally satisfied, never wanting more than they have, having reached their desired potential.

111 For they shall be judged according to their works, and every man *shall receive according to his own works, his own dominion*, in the mansions which are prepared; (D&C 76:111)

The pain and suffering for the choices made in life will take place in the spirit world as the spirits learn the plan of salvation. Here they will learn the doctrines and principles of repentance and change and come to a perfect understanding of the Atonement. Aided by a bright recollection of all their guilt and sin, without the fetters and limitations of an imperfect physical body, they will be taught the benefits of the gospel of repentance. All will have an opportunity to accept or reject the gospel and begin the process of changing their character. It is here in the spirit world that the tentacles of a loving God and loving parents will reach out to family members who either do not know of the gospel or have fallen away. Because no judgment can be made unless the gospel is understood perfectly, all will be taught the gospel by their families and loved ones who have already accepted Christ. The reason families are organized here on earth is to assist the spirits entrusted to parents (our children) in their progression toward salvation and exaltation (D&C 68:25). The same sociality will exist in the spirit world, and for the same reasons: It is within the bonds of family love that the gospel is best taught. In the spirit world those who have fallen away will be reminded of what they have been taught and perhaps knew at one time. It will require a broken heart and a contrite spirit provoked by that bright recollection of sin and guilt to help them understand. Nevertheless, all may choose for themselves and accept or reject the gospel truths even after death. Latter-day Saints have been taught by tradition that if the gospel is rejected here on earth, once presented, there will be no other chance for change and exaltation... This is simply not true (see D&C 138, even the righteous need to be taught, see verses 30, 35).

Any suffering for sin or choice will take place before the resurrection and will not endure for eternity (except for the sons of perdition).

14 Now this is the state of the souls of the wicked, yea, in darkness, and a state of awful, fearful looking for the fiery indignation of the wrath of God upon them; thus they remain in this state, as well as the righteous in paradise, *until the time of their resurrection*.

21 But whether it be at his resurrection or after, I do not say; but this much I say, that there is a space between death and the resurrection of the body, and a state of the soul in happiness or in misery *until the time which is appointed of God that the dead shall come forth*, and be reunited, both soul and body, and be brought to stand before God, and be judged according to their works. (Alma 40:14, 21)

Eventually the suffering of the wicked and those who have rejected the gospel on earth will end, and as explained in scripture, “all sin will eventually be forgiven” (Matthew 12:31).

5 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.

6 Nevertheless, *it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment*, but it is written endless torment (Because “endless and eternal” is God’s name. Also see D&C 19:10-12).

7 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 (D&C 19: 5-7)

According to God, there is an end to suffering (D&C 19). The only way that suffering could continue for eternity would be if we could remember what we might have had, or the relationships we may have had at one time. The Lord teaches us that after the resurrection our priorities will change and the memories of our former life will fade in importance. “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind” (Isaiah 65:17). This change in priority is not only merciful but ensures that all will be satisfied in whichever kingdom they choose. For every kingdom is a kingdom of glory wherein resurrected beings will be able to fill the measure of their creation and obtain their full potential.

Joseph Smith taught that progression requires character change—not only in this life but also in the spirit world as we prepare for the eternities.

The work in which we are unitedly engaged is one of no ordinary kind. The enemies we have to contend against are subtle and well-skilled in maneuvering; it behooves us to be on the alert to concentrate our energies, and that the best feelings should exist in our midst; and then, by the help of the Almighty, we shall go on from victory to victory, and from conquest to conquest; our evil passions will be subdued, our prejudices depart; we shall find no room in our bosoms for hatred; vice will hide its deformed head, and we shall stand approved in the sight of Heaven, and be acknowledged as the sons of God.

Let us realize that we are not to live to ourselves, but to God. By so doing, the greatest blessings will rest upon us both in time and in eternity. (*TPJS*, p. 179)

To be worthy of the Celestial kingdom the candidate will be required to love all mankind equally, without being a respecter of persons—in short, like God. As difficult as that seems, it would follow that the Celestial character could not love the children they may have had in mortality any more than *any other* child or person born in any other time and at any other place on earth.

Even though parents may experience emotional pain in mortality as the result of a child exercising his or her agency, parents need not fear for their offspring. We have been assured that all sin will be forgiven and that everyone will know and understand the gospel perfectly before any judgment can take place. It is reassuring to know that whatever happens will, in the end, be the result of choice, made with a *perfect* knowledge. Our children will receive a fullness of the joy for which they have prepared themselves. It is not the responsibility of the parent or priesthood leader to save an individual. The responsibility of both is to teach and make available all that is necessary for the individual to create their own relationship with Christ and the Atonement. This is only possible in the use of their own choice and agency, not the agency of parents and priesthood leaders. Every parent, should want their children to be as happy as they can be, and that will be the kingdom and glory where *they choose* and want to be, for hell is where one doesn’t belong, and heaven is where one chooses to be.