

Grace, Mercy and Justice in the Book of Mormon

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The concepts of *Grace*, *Mercy* and *Justice* are presented best in Latter-day scripture; the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. Each of these topics are discussed in the Bible, but the plain and precious truths about these doctrines were revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith as part of the restitution of all things. When the heavens are opened, the messages that pour from the words of God and angels will always reveal the truths of salvation and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Faith in Christ, Repentance, Baptism and the Gift of the Holy Ghost. In particular the eternal doctrines of *Grace*, *Mercy*, and *Justice* are explained, defined, and expanded to help mankind understand how to prepare for the day when all shall stand before the judgment bar of God.

The End of Punishment

To begin the process of understanding Grace, and Mercy, punishment or judgment should first be reviewed from a scriptural point of view. The Book of Mormon is an all or nothing book. It seems, in this book of scripture, that a person will either be: “in the presence of God” or in ‘outer darkness.’ This is the “all or nothing” perception of the Nephites, who were closely related to and part of the Children of Israel. Perhaps, this Old Testament type of teaching was necessary for the Nephites and Lamanites to make the required changes in their life and lifestyle. Nevertheless, concepts and doctrines found in modern Latter-day Saint scripture such as; different degrees of glory and the judgments and character traits that would render a judgment in different kingdoms of glory are not found in the Book of Mormon. However, there are doctrines found in this great book that shed tremendous light on the concepts of grace, mercy, and the justice and judgment of God.

To begin a discussion on the topics of grace, mercy and justice, the topic of ‘judgment’ should be addressed first. There is a notion that all who will not accept the Gospel of Jesus Christ and exercise “faith unto repentance” will suffer throughout eternity. This is not so according to holy writ, and the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Prophet Joseph taught that: “All sins shall be forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Ghost; for Jesus will save all except the sons of perdition.”ⁱ He continues by stating:

All sin, and all blasphemies, and every transgression, except one, that man can be guilty of, may be forgiven; and there is a salvation for all men, either in this world or the world to come, who have not committed the unpardonable sin, there being a provision either in this world or the world of spirits. Hence God has made a provision that every spirit in the eternal world can be ferreted out and save unless he has committed that unpardonable sin. . . God has wrought out a salvation for all men, unless they have committed a certain sin.ⁱⁱ

It should be kept in mind that “salvation” is not the same as exaltation, and to be in any kingdom of glory is a salvation from sin and death. The Prophet Joseph explains this again using the words of Christ.

The situation of the Christian nations after death, is a subject that has called forth all the wisdom and talent of the philosopher and the divine, and it is an opinion which is generally received, that the destiny of man is irretrievably fixed at his death, and that he is made either eternally happy, or eternally miserable; that if a man dies without a knowledge of God, he must be eternally damned, without any mitigation of his punishment, alleviation of his pain,

or the most latent hope of a deliverance while endless ages shall roll along. However orthodox this principle may be, we shall find that it is at variance with the testimony of Holy Writ, for our Savior says, that “all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men wherewith they shall blaspheme; but the blasphemy against the Holt Ghost shall not be forgiven (See Matthew 12:31).ⁱⁱⁱ

For all sin to be forgiven, would seem to mean that the judgments of God in the hereafter are not based on the unrepentant sins committed, but some other stipulation. The kingdom of glory that one might inherit lies in the character created by the choices of the individual. Heaven is a place where you belong and Hell is where you don't belong, and that could be the Celestial Kingdom if you haven't the same nature as those who dwell there.

3 Then will ye longer deny the Christ, or can ye behold the Lamb of God? Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with him under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws?

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 9:3-4)

The punishment and torment associated with sin is not a never-ending suffering and burning in a sulfuric volcanic like environment. This torment is an emotional feeling an understanding of one's mistakes and choices made in their relationships with God and mankind. These are the things that will affect the mind and spirit in a way that would be greater than any physical pain could. Christ stated that the unrepentant individual would suffer as He did, which caused Him, the greatest of all to tremble because of pain'. The Prophet Joseph explained this suffering:

A man is his own tormenter and his own condemner. Hence the saying, They shall go into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone. I say, so is the torment of man.^{iv}

Eternal punishment would be a never-ending remembrance of one's wickedness and the pain that one may have caused to others because of their actions. Eternal suffering would be the *unforgettable knowledge and memory* of what one could have received, or what one did to not receive. Since the scriptures and Joseph Smith teach, “all sins shall be forgiven” except the sin against the Holy Ghost the punishment must end sometime.

The Lord, in the Doctrine and Covenants, explains that there is an end to punishment, even though an inheritance in a Telestial or Terrestrial Kingdom might be the chosen glories for some.

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.

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.

10 For, behold, the mystery of godliness, how great is it! For, behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore—

11 Eternal punishment is God's punishment.

12 Endless punishment is God's punishment. (D&C 19:5-7, 10-12)

The Lord explains that there will be a judgment and a punishment that will be severe, but nonetheless limited in time as He explains that “it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment”. He then explains that punishment which comes from God, is described as “endless and eternal” because that is His name and that it might “work upon the hearts” of the sinner. In other words, it is written this way to scare the hell out of people: but there will be and end to it.

The Book of Mormon explains that there will be a time when the torment of the wicked in the spirit world will end. Alma describes the spirit world in the verses below, speaking of those who are righteous as well as those who are wicked, explains when the ‘happiness and misery’ will come to an end.

12 And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.

13 And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of the wicked, yea, who are evil—for behold, they have no part nor portion of the Spirit of the Lord; for behold, they chose evil works rather than good; therefore the spirit of the devil did enter into them, and take possession of their house—and these shall be cast out into outer darkness; there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and *this because of their own iniquity*, being led captive by the will of the devil.

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 40:12-14, 21)

According to these scriptures the resurrection puts an end to punishment. Multiple times in the Doctrine and Covenants, it explains that the punishments of judgment and the suffering of wickedness will last only “until the day of redemption” (See D&C 78:12; 82:21; 104:9; 132:26). And what is the scriptural definition of redemption?

14 Now, verily I say unto you, that through the redemption which is made for you is brought to pass the resurrection from the dead.

15 And the spirit and the body are the soul of man.

16 And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul. (D&C 88:14-16)

It might be asked, if and when will man forget and not remember what one could have had, or when will one forget the evil they have done? Isaiah, speaking of the resurrection, answers these questions. Keep in mind that ‘all sin shall be forgiven,’ but character changes by choice.

17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. (Isaiah 65:17)

When one becomes aware of the reality of life after death and that this temporal life is as a dream in the night, there will be no need to remember mortality. Death, like birth, is an event all live through, and just

as the adult does not desire or need to remember their infancy, so also it will be with mortality, as all will eventually learn that reality truly exists only in the realm of the sacred (eternity). Life on earth is but a dream, and a foggy one at that, compared to the reality of an immortal life that endures for eternity.

The Work and Glory of God

The Lord declares: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). One of the most quoted scriptures in the Church, this verse outlines the ‘work’ and the ‘glory’ of God, which seeks to reverse the effects of the fall of Adam and also the fall of man. God’s work is to provide the means: that death from the fall might be overcome through a resurrection to an incorruptible physical body that will be inseparably connected to its eternal spirit. and Second aspect is a restoration or return to the presence of God. The “work” of God is two-fold, one, to reverse the effects of the Fall of Adam (physical and spiritual death) and two, provide a way *for the exaltation or eternal life* of mankind in the presence of God. The first requires a power of resurrection, and the second, the power of the atonement. The first connected to grace and the second to mercy.

The Effects of the Fall

6 For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfil the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the fall; and the fall came by reason of transgression; and because man became fallen they were cut off from the presence of the Lord. (2 Nephi 9:6)

The Power of the Atonement

7 Wherefore, it must needs be an infinite atonement—save it should be an infinite atonement this corruption could not put on incorruption. Wherefore, the first judgment which came upon man must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth, to rise no more. (2 Nephi 9:7)

The Reverse of the Atonement

8 O the wisdom of God, his mercy and grace! For behold, if the flesh should rise no more our spirits must become subject to that angel who fell from before the presence of the Eternal God, and became the devil, to rise no more.

9 And our spirits must have become like unto him, and we become devils, angels to a devil, to be shut out from the presence of our God, and to remain with the father of lies, in misery, like unto himself; (2 Nephi 9:8)

The Work and Glory of God

10 O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit. (2 Nephi 9:10)

Jacob concludes this sermon in the next chapter with the phrase that: “only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved” (2 Nephi 10:24). The brother of Nephi then explains in the final verse in this chapter what is entailed or meant by the term “grace” introducing of the concept of “mercy” that has been prepared by God:

24 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh; and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the *grace of God* that ye are saved.

25 Wherefore, may God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, [grace] and also from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, [mercy] that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God, that ye may praise him through grace divine. Amen. (2 Nephi 10:24-25)

This “grace” comes through the ‘power of the resurrection’, which power is requisite to save mankind from, the death of the physical body and the first spiritual death. The “everlasting death” of being cut off from the presence of God eternally may only be reversed or accomplished by the ‘power of the Atonement’. The powers of the Atonement and Resurrection are required to move forward toward exaltation in the presence of God.

In 2 Nephi 9:8-9 quoted above under “The Reverse of the Atonement” it is seen that without a physical body after death, all would become subject to Satan, and eventually become his followers. The Prophet Joseph Smith discusses the importance of the physical body to overcome evil more than once. Speaking of salvation the Prophet Joseph teaches:

Salvation is nothing more nor less that to triumph over all enemies and put them under our feet. And when we have power to put all enemies under our feet in this world, and a knowledge to triumph over all evil spirits in the world to come then we are saved...No person can have this salvation except through a tabernacle.^v

We came to this earth that we might have a body, and present it pure before God in the celestial kingdom...All beings who have bodies have power over those who have not.^{vi}

When those have come into this world and received tabernacles, then died and again have risen and received glorified bodies, they will have an ascendancy over the spirits who have received no bodies, or kept not their first estate, like the devil.^{vii}

before the foundation of the Earth. . . the Spirits of all Men were subject to oppression and the express purpose of God in giving it a tabernacle was to arm it against the power of darkness.^{viii}

The resurrection of the physical body is necessary for the salvation over death and evil. Scripture also declares that the resurrection is necessary to return all men, good and evil, into the presence of God once again.

The celestial “glory” of God lies in the “eternal life” of the faithful. This eternal life is the same life and lifestyle of deity. It is a celestial resurrection and exaltation with God through His plan of salvation. God continues his work and receives his glory through the exaltation of those resurrected beings that are worthy to be called His sons and daughters. Speaking of the covenants and blessings of the righteous seed of Abraham, the Lord explains how our exaltation affects Him:

31 This promise (of exaltation) is yours also, because ye are of Abraham, and the promise was made unto Abraham; and by this law is the continuation of the works of my Father, wherein he glorifieth himself. (D&C 132:31)

The work and glory of God is the process prepared for our salvation and exaltation in the eternal worlds, as all enemies of man are overcome by the “power of the Atonement” and the “power of the Resurrection.”

The scripture explains that there needs to be an Atonement to redeem man from sin and death. The two deaths spoken of in scripture are the physical death of the body, and the spiritual death, which is to be cut off from the presence of God. This spiritual or second death will come “again” upon all those who refuse to exercise faith in Jesus Christ unto the fruits of repentance. Paul explains that the result of sin is ‘death’ as he refers to the fall of man: “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23). The wages of sin is the “death” of the body and the “death” of the spirit. These are the two deaths of the fall that must be overcome by Atonement and resurrection. The Atonement of Christ, though connected to the resurrection, provides a way back into the presence of God where one’s confidence can wax strong, for no unclean thing can be in His presence (3 Ne. 27:19).

Grace

The word “grace” comes from the Greek “charis” which means free gift, an undeserved gift without stipulation or the ability of rejection. We get our English word “charity” from the root “charis”. Nevertheless, ‘grace’ is a free gift offered from God, through Jesus Christ. There is nothing required by the recipient for “grace.” The implication and translation would render it something received free from God, as described in scripture. All men are saved from the affects of the fall of Adam by this free gift of “grace.” The resurrection and the return to the presence of God are restored to all by the ‘power of the resurrection’, which can only come about by the power of the Atonement (2 Ne. 10:25). This may seem somewhat unusual based on the traditions that are taught about ‘grace’ in the Church and in conventional Christianity, yet The Book of Mormon is clear on the definition of the term.

When Enoch begins to teach the people before the flood of Noah, he quotes from the book of Adam that contained the details of the first man learning the gospel from the Lord. Adam questions the Lord about the need for repentance and the Lord begins to explain the definition of ‘grace’.

53 And our father Adam spake unto the Lord, and said: Why is it that men must repent and be baptized in water? And the Lord said unto Adam: Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden.

54 Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world. (Moses 6:53-54)

Adam is taught that his transgression in the Garden of Eden has been forgiven: for ‘if he partakes of the fruit, then a Savior will be provided’ to atone for his transgression. Because this was taught by the Lord to Adam, it was said: that the ‘Son of God’ had ‘atoned for original guilt’ for all mankind. Therefore, all children born to Adam and mankind, are “whole,” clean, pure and spiritually perfect when born, and the wages of sin and justice because of Adam’s fall, (eternal physical and spiritual death) have no claim upon them in any way. Children are pure and perfect, sinless and saved from the foundation of the world until they become accountable. Because of this Enoch continues to teach his listeners from Adam’s journal.

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.

56 And it is given unto them to know good from evil; wherefore they are agents unto themselves, and I have given unto you another law and commandment.

57 Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence; (Moses 6:55-57)

These verses explain that because children (who are whole at birth) are born into a sinful world, eventually sin begins to conceive in their hearts. And because of agency and their knowledge of good and evil they must learn to repent (i.e. change their character) through faith in Christ. The Doctrine and Covenants teaches the same concept as explained by Enoch:

38 Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God.

39 And that wicked one cometh and taketh away light and truth, through disobedience, from the children of men, and because of the tradition of their fathers. (D&C 93:38-39)

These verses explain the same concepts, as did Moses Chapter Six, about two important points. The first being that infants are “whole” (Moses 6:54 above) or as the D&C 93 explains, “innocent before God” in their infancy, or until accountable. This means every person ever born, began life pure and innocent, free from spiritual death or separation from God. This innocence is because of the infinite sacrifice of the ‘Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world’. As shown above the second, and perhaps most important point is that all men were “redeemed from the fall” even before they were born.

Everyone began life without a sinful debt to God, man, judgment or justice. All begin life free from the fall, as the “Son of God hath already atoned for original guilt” (Moses 6: 54). Even before Christ came to the earth in mortality, the sacrifice that is “infinite and eternal” was already in effect. He is the Lamb slain before the foundation of this and all other worlds of our God, even before they are, were, or will be created. This is the free gift of “grace,” as everyone begins life with the guarantee of immortality and a return to the presence of God through the power of the resurrection. Thus, all are truly saved from the affects of the fall [‘by grace’] not by any the works of the flesh. Man cannot save himself from sin, separation and death, the price paid is the sacrifice of God, the law-giver, and cannot be made by man or beast (Alma 34:10). The authority to institute this salvation lies only in the Son of God, who has the power, and responsibility for the spiritual and temporal salvation of His Father’s children. Only Christ has the power to satisfy the demands of justice, which demands or wages for mankind are the deaths of the body and the death or separation of the spirit, from God. Only Christ was perfect in his obedience to the laws and commandments of God. Only Christ was without sin, and therefore, the demands of justice (death and hell) have no claim upon him. There were no demands of justice upon Christ or ‘wages of sin’ that must be paid, thus he could return to the presence of God without a mediator. The sinless sacrifice of Christ had power over death, becoming the first fruits of the resurrection of all men.

Below will be a number of scriptural references, each explaining that by the “grace” of Christ, all are redeemed from the fall; all will be resurrected and all will be restored to the presence of God.

15 For behold, he surely must die that salvation may come; yea, it behooveth him and becometh expedient that he dieth, to bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, that thereby men may be brought into the presence of the Lord.

16 Yea, behold, this death bringeth to pass the resurrection, and redeemeth all mankind from the first death—that spiritual death; for all mankind, by the fall of Adam being cut off from the presence of the Lord, are considered as dead, both as to things temporal and to things spiritual.

17 But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord. (Helaman 14:15-17)

42 Now, there is a death which is called a temporal death; and the death of Christ shall loose the bands of this temporal death, that all shall be raised from this temporal death.

43 The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame, even as we now are at this time; and we shall be brought to

stand before God, knowing even as we know now, and have a bright recollection of all our guilt.

44 Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young, both bond and free, both male and female, both the wicked and the righteous; and even there shall not so much as a hair of their heads be lost; but every thing shall be restored to its perfect frame, as it is now, or in the body, and shall be brought and be arraigned before the bar of Christ the Son, and God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, which is one Eternal God, to be judged according to their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil. (Alma 11:42-44)

22 . . . that he shall suffer and die to atone for their sins; and that he shall rise again from the dead, which shall bring to pass the resurrection, that all men shall stand before him, to be judged at the last and judgment day, according to their works. (Alma 33:22)

12 And Amulek hath spoken plainly concerning death, and being raised from this mortality to a state of immortality, and being brought before the bar of God, to be judged according to our works. (Alma 12:12)

Mormon explains that God: “created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, [because Adam and Eve partake of the fruit a Savior will be provided] even the Father and the Son; and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man” (Mormon 9:12). This redemption is the resurrection as described in the Doctrine and Covenants:

14 Now, verily I say unto you, that through the redemption which is made for you is brought to pass the resurrection from the dead.

15 And the spirit and the body are the soul of man.

16 And the resurrection from the dead is the redemption of the soul. (D&C 88:14-16)

In most instances the term ‘redemption’ is synonymous with the resurrection, which will come upon all men, good or evil. This resurrection or redemption is part of the free gift of grace that comes to all because of the death and resurrection of Christ.

13 And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, they are brought back into the presence of the Lord; yea, this is wherein all men are redeemed, because the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection, which bringeth to pass a redemption from an endless sleep, from which sleep all men shall be awakened by the power of God when the trump shall sound; and they shall come forth, both small and great, and all shall stand before his bar, being redeemed and loosed from this eternal band of death, which death is a temporal death.

14 And then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them; and then cometh the time that he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still; he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still. (Mormon 9:12-14)

The “grace” of Christ provides the immortality through the resurrection, and restores everyone to the presence of God. This restoration brings all mankind to stand before God, to be judged ‘according to their works’ i.e., their character (See: Alma 33:22; Alma 12:12; Mormon 9:14 above). It is there, in the presence of God, that all will have a bright recollection of their guilt and will either ‘shrink’ from his presence, or their confidence shall ‘wax strong’ (D&C121:45) based on their faith unto repentance (Alma 34:15-17).

The resurrection will come upon all men, and all will stand in the presence of God to be judged according to their works. This resurrection will be one of differing degrees of glory depending upon their preparation and choice.

28 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;

29 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. 2 Nephi 2:28-29

Mercy and justice must work hand in hand. Both are based on agency, both are a choice of developed character, and both are founded in the choice of faith in Christ and the ‘fruit meet for repentance’ (Alma 12:15; Alma 13:13).

4 . . . when all people, and all kindreds, and all nations and tongues shall stand before God, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—

5 If they be good, to the resurrection of everlasting life; and if they be evil, to the resurrection of damnation; being on a parallel, the one on the one hand and the other on the other hand, according to the mercy, and the justice, and the holiness which is in Christ, who was before the world began. (3 Nephi 26:4-5)

Mercy

It is by the power of the Atonement that the power of the resurrection is brought to pass, and because of the Atonement “mercy” exists to satisfy the demands of Justice, for those who ‘exercise faith unto repentance’. Lehi, leaving his last will and testimony teaches that, the redemption is based on a plan that allows agency to work freely in the acceptance of the Atonement by faith in Christ and his Gospel. It has been seen, that by the ‘grace’ of God all will be resurrected and brought back into the presence of God to be judged according to their works or character.

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

7 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.

8 Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise.

9 Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God, inasmuch as he shall make intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved.

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—(2 Nephi 2:6-10)

Alma teaches his sons these eternal concepts. All those who will remain in the presence of God, having their confidence wax strong, will need the “mercy” offered by Christ, which mercy is only offered to those who exercise faith unto repentance. ‘Faith and repentance’ initiates the ‘mercy’ needed to eventually

become clean and pure before God, allowing one to remain in His presence (for no ‘unclean thing can be there). This “mercy” is accomplished by the power of the Atonement.

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

13 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.

[Justice cannot be satisfied, but only on the conditions of repentance and faith in Christ “in this probationary state.” Justice would demand that after all are restored to the presence of God by grace, that to remain there one would have to exercise their faith unto repentance in order for mercy to satisfy justice, and remain there.]

14 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.

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.

16 Now, repentance could not come unto men 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.

17 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? (Alma 42:12-17)

Mercy is required to claim the penitent from the demands of justice, which for those who have not repented, will be cut off *again* from the presence of God. Mankind must be brought back into the presence of God to be judged according to their works, in order that ‘justice’ might be satisfied according to the law.

22 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.

23 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.

24 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.

25 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.

26 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 42:22-26)

In Alma Chapter Eleven quoted above, verses 40-41 (not quoted) add this insight to these thoughts about judgment and mercy:

40 And he shall come into the world to redeem his people; and he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name; and these are they that shall have eternal life, and salvation cometh to none else.

41 Therefore the wicked remain as though there had been no redemption made, except it be the loosing of the bands of death; for behold, the day cometh that all shall rise from the dead and stand before God, and be judged according to their works. (Alma 11:40-41)

Notice in verse 40 “he shall take upon him the transgressions of those who believe on his name...and none else.” For every one else or those who refuse to repent they receive no redemption “except it be the loosing of the bands of death” and then “rise from the dead and stand before God, and be judged.”

King Benjamin addresses this doctrine of ‘mercy’ and how it will affect those who are restored to the presence of God by ‘grace’ and are found unclean and unworthy by their choices and the character they have developed.

36 And now, I say unto you, my brethren, that after ye have known and have been taught all these things, if ye should transgress and go contrary to that which has been spoken, that ye do withdraw yourselves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in you to guide you in wisdom's paths that ye may be blessed, prospered, and preserved—

37 I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples.

38 Therefore if that man repenteth not, and remaineth and dieth an enemy to God, the demands of divine justice do awaken his immortal soul to a lively sense of his own guilt, which doth cause him to shrink from the presence of the Lord, and doth fill his breast with guilt, and pain, and anguish, which is like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever.

39 And now I say unto you, that mercy hath no claim on that man; therefore his final doom is to endure a never-ending torment. (Mosiah 2:36-39)

The character traits necessary to dwell with God are coupled with the mercy and grace provided by the plan of redemption and salvation. Benjamin introduces this character change and the effects of those who have not repented (changed their character) at the time they are restored ‘by grace’ to the presence of God to be judged.

18 For behold he judgeth, and his judgment is just; and the infant perisheth not that dieth in his infancy; but men drink damnation to their own souls except they humble themselves and become as little children,

[the character change of becoming again as children, and putting off of the natural man, described below]

and believe that salvation was, and is, and is to come, in and through the atoning blood of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent.

19 For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.

20 And moreover, I say unto you, that the time shall come when the knowledge of a Savior shall spread throughout every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.

21 And behold, when that time cometh, none shall be found blameless before God, except it be little children, only through repentance and faith on the name of the Lord God Omnipotent.

24 . . .they shall be judged, every man according to his works, whether they be good, or whether they be evil.

25 And if they be evil they are consigned to an awful view of their own guilt and abominations, which doth cause them to shrink from the presence of the Lord into a state of misery and endless torment, from whence they can no more return; therefore they have drunk damnation to their own souls.

26 Therefore, they have drunk out of the cup of the wrath of God, which justice could no more deny unto them than it could deny that Adam should fall because of his partaking of the forbidden fruit; therefore, mercy could have claim on them no more forever. (Mosiah 3:17-26)

Benjamin ends his address to the people with the plea to change their character. This he explains they must do by ‘always abounding in good works’, to benefit from the divine justice and mercy of God:

15 Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God Omnipotent, may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things, in heaven and in earth, who is God above all. Amen. (Mosiah 5:15)

Alma teaches the next generation the same concepts that King Benjamin taught. The gospel is new to every generation, as knowledge and testimonies are not genetic but earned and learned.

33 Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you.

[the arms of mercy are there, he stands at the door and knocks, the choice to be received by Christ is ours, and mercy is awaiting our faith and repentance]

34 Yea, he saith: Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life; yea, ye shall eat and drink of the bread and the waters of life freely;

35 Yea, come unto me and bring forth works of righteousness, and ye shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire—

36 For behold, the time is at hand that whosoever bringeth forth not good fruit, or whosoever doeth not the works of righteousness, the same have cause to wail and mourn. (Alma 5:33-36, the rest of the chapter should be read also)

20 . . . but in his great mercy hath brought us over that everlasting gulf of death and misery, even to the salvation of our souls.

21 And now behold, my brethren, what natural man is there that knoweth these things? I say unto you, there is none that knoweth these things, save it be the penitent.

22 Yea, he that repenteth and exerciseth faith, and bringeth forth good works, and prayeth continually without ceasing—unto such it is given to know the mysteries of God; yea, unto such it shall be given to reveal things which never have been revealed. . . (Alma 26:20-22)

The “good works’ and “good fruit” is character change and is the process called repentance. Exercising faith in the Atonement, unto the changing of character (repentance) is that which initiates the plan of mercy

for the benefit of the penitent. For “whosoever repenteth shall find mercy; and he that findeth mercy and endureth to the end the same shall be saved” (Alma 32:13).

15 And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance.

16 And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption.

17 Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you; (Alma 34:15-17)

The Savior, before he appears to the Nephites, speaks from the heavens and declares: “. . . if ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me” (3 Nephi 9:14). Alma reinforces the Savior’s invitation to come unto him by explaining mercy:

33 But God did call on men, in the name of his Son, (this being the plan of redemption which was laid) saying: If ye will repent, and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son;

34 Therefore, whosoever repenteth, and hardeneth not his heart, he shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of his sins; and these shall enter into my rest.

35 And whosoever will harden his heart and will do iniquity, behold, I swear in my wrath that he shall not enter into my rest. (Alma 12:33-35)

The Restoration of Character

The gospel of ‘repentance’ is: the process of changing one’s character, which begins the purifying and perfecting process. The doctrine of “restoration” taught by Alma is that of the restoration of character, which character belongs to the eternal spirit.

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.

22 Yea, this bringeth about the restoration of those things of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets.

[What is the “this” that bringeth about the restoration? the following verse?]

23 The soul shall be restored to the body, and the body to the soul; yea, and every limb and joint shall be restored to its body; yea, even a hair of the head shall not be lost; but all things shall be restored to their proper and perfect frame.

24 And now, my son, this is the restoration of which has been spoken by the mouths of the prophets—

25 And then shall the righteous shine forth in the kingdom of God.

26 But behold, an awful death cometh upon the wicked; for they die as to things pertaining to things of righteousness; for they are unclean, and no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God; but they are cast out, and consigned to partake of the fruits of their labors or their works, which have been evil; and they drink the dregs of a bitter cup. (Alma 40:21-26)

Alma expands the concept and doctrine of ‘restoration’ of character in order that the reader cannot misunderstand. All become what they desire to be, and all will be what they have become. The comments of Alma in chapter 40 immediately above and in chapter 41 immediately below are not just about the resurrection of the body but the restoration of character.

2 I say unto thee, my son, that the plan of restoration is requisite with the justice of God; for it is requisite that all things should be restored to their proper order. Behold, it is requisite and just, according to the power and resurrection of Christ, that the soul of man should be restored to its body,

[The resurrected body will become the eternal home of the spirit, and the spirit ‘inseparably connected’ with the body, will become the character of the resurrected being.]

and that every part of the body should be restored to itself.

3 And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good.

4 And if their works are evil they shall be restored unto them for evil. Therefore, all things shall be restored to their proper order, every thing to its natural frame

[Notice that this verse is explaining, that because of the resurrection of the body “—mortality raised to immortality, corruption to incorruption—” the spirit must be restored to itself; the character remains]

—mortality raised to immortality, corruption to incorruption—raised to endless happiness to inherit the kingdom of God, or to endless misery to inherit the kingdom of the devil, the one [the body] on one hand, the other [the spirit] on the other—

5 The one raised to happiness according to his desires of happiness, or good according to his desires of good; and the other to evil according to his desires of evil; for as he has desired to do evil all the day long even so shall he have his reward of evil when the night cometh.

6 And so it is on the other hand. If he hath repented of his sins, and desired righteousness until the end of his days, even so he shall be rewarded unto righteousness.

7 These are they that are redeemed of the Lord; yea, these are they that are taken out, that are delivered from that endless night of darkness; and thus they stand or fall; for behold, they are their own judges, whether to do good or do evil. (Alma 41:2-7)

Because of the “restoration” every individual becomes as Verse Seven states, “their own judges” choosing where they want to be for the rest of eternity. God will force no man to heaven or hell, for the doors of both open for all to enter the eternal home of their choice. Agency is the supreme law of existence.

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)

The final prophets of the Book of Mormon discuss restoration and resurrection again, to make sure that the readers will not misunderstand these important concepts presented by earlier prophets, leaders and teachers

13 And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, they are brought back into the presence of the Lord; yea, this is wherein all men are redeemed, because the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection, which bringeth to pass a redemption from an endless sleep, from which sleep all men shall be awakened by the power of God [grace] when the trump shall sound; and they shall come forth, both small and great, and all shall stand before his bar, being redeemed and loosed from this eternal band of death, which death is a temporal death.

14 And then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them; and then cometh the time that he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still; he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still. (Mormon 9:13-14)

The two verses (above) explain that the ‘judgment of God’ is the restoration of the ones character. Because of this restoration, according to Alma and Samuel in Helaman’s record, the individuals become “their own judges” (Alma 41:7). If they are ‘condemned’ and ‘shrink from the presence of God, they “bring upon themselves their own condemnation” (Helaman 14:29).

As previously explained, repentance is the process of changing character, and this process must be in affect and connected to one’s faith in Christ for ‘mercy’ to step in and satisfy the demands of justice. Without faith and repentance justice would eternally separate those who have not yet become like God in this process of changing character. Those who have repented and are repenting (as King Benjamin taught by “putting off the natural man”) yet imperfect in that change, their faith in Christ and the Atonement initiates ‘mercy’ as described in scripture. The change of character is always based on agency, and choice; and ‘mercy’ satisfies the demands of ‘justice;’ thus giving the penitent the “TIME” required for the individual to make the necessary changes of character (must be through agency) for the salvation and exaltation desired. Joseph Smith implied that one must develop the character of God before one may dwell with God. The character change required is seen in those converted subjects of King Benjamin, who declared that the “mighty change” that took place in their hearts caused them to “have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). Alma speaks of those who were sanctified by the Holy Ghost (something all the exalted must become) and their character and nature:

12 Now they, after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost, having their garments made white, being pure and spotless before God, could not look upon sin save it were with abhorrence; and there were many, exceedingly great many, who were made pure and entered into the rest of the Lord their God. (Alma 13:12)

2 And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we believe all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have *no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually*. (Mosiah 5:2)

Some think or believe that God will simply and instantly change their character or that because one might already believe in Christ and the Atonement, the work necessary for salvation is already complete. Without

any thought or understanding, many members believe because they have participated in the ordinances required for salvation and exaltation that all is well, and their exaltation is ensured by ordinance. Ordinances mean nothing without the character to justify the ratification of the ordinance by the Holy Spirit, and ‘sanctified by the blood of the Lamb’ (Moses 6:60). When a family or individual is baptized, the members of a ward rally around, and talk of nothing for a year, but the goal of participating in the Endowment and the Sealing; as though that were the end of the work of salvation and exaltation. The greatest blessings of the Temple mean nothing without the character required for the promises offered by ordinance. Participating in any ordinance is not the end goal, but a beginning. The temple is a “commencement” not an end. Ordinances are necessary and provide an indispensable hope of a future reality (Alma 13:16), which at the same time mark the commencement of a long and difficult road of learning and character change. It is only through the agency and choice of faithfulness and character change that an ordinance has any power, thus the phrase ‘enduring to the end. The real power of an ordinance lies in the agency of the individual recipient, not in the ordinance itself or the priesthood of the officiator.

This restoration of character must take place, as the nature or character of an individual is developed by the agency and action manifested by one’s desires, words, works, and thoughts.

12 And Amulek hath spoken plainly concerning death, and being raised from this mortality to a state of immortality, and being brought before the bar of God, to be judged according to our works.

13 Then if our hearts have been hardened, yea, if we have hardened our hearts against the word, insomuch that it has not been found in us, then will our state be awful, for then we shall be condemned.

14 For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us; we shall not be found spotless; and our thoughts will also condemn us; and in this awful state we shall not dare to look up to our God; and we would fain be glad if we could command the rocks and the mountains to fall upon us to hide us from his presence.

15 But this cannot be; we must come forth and stand before him in his glory, and in his power, and in his might, majesty, and dominion, and acknowledge to our everlasting shame that all his judgments are just; that he is just in all his works, and that he is merciful unto the children of men, and that he has all power to save every man that believeth on his name and bringeth forth fruit meet for repentance.

16 And now behold, I say unto you then cometh a death, even a second death, which is a spiritual death; then is a time that whosoever dieth in his sins, as to a temporal death, shall also die a spiritual death; yea, he shall die as to things pertaining unto righteousness. (Alma 12:12-16)

Since no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of God, one cannot suppose that the perfection, purity and cleanliness of character, will happen by magic, miracle or even by ordinance. Character change is a “power of agency, and also the power for exaltation.” Character or nature is developed only by choice, ‘for God will not’ as the Prophet Joseph taught, ‘and Satan cannot, control the agency of man.’^{ix} The Prophet continued by implying that ‘we cannot dwell with God until we have the character of God and that will take a long time’ because we must change that character by agency and choice.

If you wish to go where God is, you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses, for if we are not drawing towards God in principle, we are going from Him and drawing towards the devil. Yes, I am standing in the midst of all kinds of people. Search your hearts, and see if you are like God. I have searched mine, and feel to repent of all my sins. ^x Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small

capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.^{xi}

. . . so it is with the principles of the Gospel—you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation. But it will be a great while after you have passed through the veil before you will have learned them. It is not all to be comprehended in this world; it will be a great work to learn our salvation and exaltation even beyond the grave.^{xii}

Agency is the supreme law of existence (D&C 93:30) and this ‘agency’ and choice was the freedom that Satan sought to take away from the children of Adam (Moses 4:3). Agency must exist, for man will become what he desires. The works and actions of good, or evil, are the “works” by which all men will be judged, and are a product of one’s character. If God, or the devil *controls* any action or even thought, then agency has been compromised, and life is no longer a probationary state. The good and evil forces that pull, tempt or inspire man must be equal upon mankind, if this were not the case then man could claim to be a victim of God or the devil, and could cry ‘foul’ at the judgment. The force that brakes the tie between good and evil is only broken by the agency of the individual. Nevertheless, one may choose to be influenced by the spirit of God or the spirit of the devil. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). No matter how popular, there is no such rationalization as: the “devil made me do it” available to mankind. This life is a “probationary state” of character development, and because we are born into a sinful world; sin conceives in our hearts (Moses 6:55) by choice, not by Satan. Joseph Smith embraced this same conclusion:

All persons are entitled to their agency, for God has so ordained it. He has constituted mankind moral agents, and given them power to choose good or evil; to seek after that which is good, by pursuing the pathway of holiness in this life, which brings peace of mind, and joy in the Holy Ghost here, and a fulness of joy and happiness at His right hand hereafter; or to pursue an evil course, going on in sin and rebellion against God, thereby bringing condemnation to their souls in this world, and an eternal loss in the world to come.

Satan cannot seduce us by his enticements unless we in our hearts consent and yield. Our organization is such that we can resist the devil; if we were not organized so, we would not be free agents.

The devil has no power over us only as we permit him; the moment we revolt at anything which comes from God, the devil takes power.

Satan was generally blamed for the evils which we did, but if he was the cause of all our wickedness, men could not be condemned. The devil could not compel mankind to do evil; all was voluntary. Those who resisted the Spirit of God, would be liable to be led into temptation, and then the association of heaven would be withdrawn from those who refused to be made partakers of such great glory. God would not exert any compulsory means, and the devil could not; and such ideas as were entertained [on these subjects] by many were absurd.^{xiii}

After the mental age of accountability and our covenant of obedience through baptism, we become unclean by choice and agency, separating ourselves from God by the desires of the flesh, pride and ignorance thus becoming the “natural man” in this evil and sinful world in which we live. Death is an event we live through and after death the character of the spirit will be the same character that the individual chose to be in life.

Ye cannot say, when ye are brought to that awful crisis, that I will repent, that I will return to my God. Nay, ye cannot say this; for that same spirit [*character*] which doth possess your bodies at the time that ye go out of this life, that same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world. (Alma 34:34)

The spirit world is part of this probationary state; else work for the dead would be fruitless. Alma states, “there *must needs be a space betwixt the time of death and the time of the resurrection*” (Alma 40:6, 9) which time or space is required to learn the plan of salvation and the Gospel of Jesus Christ perfectly so that our agency and choice of character will not be compromised.

This perfection of understanding is something that can only take place in the spirit world. Those who have fallen away from the truths of the Gospel on earth have not and cannot condemn themselves or be condemned until they learn and understand the Gospel, the Atonement and the Plan of Salvation perfectly, without misconception or misunderstanding. The spirit world or time between death and the resurrection is the only possible time and place where the limitations, abilities and restrictions of a physical body, mental abilities, culture and education will not influence understanding and choice. This perfect understanding must occur before a freedom of choice is able to exist. This perfect understanding must be complete before the resurrection that will restore character to character and corruption to incorruption, to stand in the presence of God.

At the resurrection, the spirit and body now “inseparably connected” will be what they have chosen to become through their agency and *perfect knowledge*, to receive the “fullness of joy” (D&C 93:33, 34) that they are capable of receiving. After the resurrection all outside of the Celestial Kingdom, will “enjoy that which they are willing to receive, because they were not willing to enjoy that which they might have received” (D&C 88:32). Immortal and resurrected, all beings will receive the glory that their spirits [*i.e. their character*] have prepared themselves to receive.

21 And they who are not sanctified through the law which I have given unto you, even the law of Christ, must inherit another kingdom, even that of a terrestrial kingdom, or that of a telestial kingdom.

22 For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom cannot abide a celestial glory.

28 They who are of a celestial spirit shall receive the same body which was a natural body; even ye shall receive your bodies, and your glory shall be that glory by which your bodies are quickened.

29 Ye who are quickened by a portion of the celestial glory shall then receive of the same, even a fulness.

30 And they who are quickened by a portion of the terrestrial glory shall then receive of the same, even a fulness.

31 And also they who are quickened by a portion of the telestial glory shall then receive of the same, even a fulness.

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 88:21, 22, 28-31, 33)

The result of a ‘restoration’ of character is often termed a ‘judgment of God’ yet, this judgment comes by choice and agency. All will choose where they want to be for eternity. Hell is where you don’t belong, (even in the Celestial Kingdom) and the wicked will shrink, by choice from the presence of God.

46 Prepare your souls for that glorious day when justice shall be administered unto the righteous, even the day of judgment, that ye may not shrink with awful fear; that ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim: Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty—but I know my guilt; I transgressed thy law, and my transgressions are mine; and the devil hath obtained me, that I am a prey to his awful misery. (2 Nephi 9:46)

31 Yea, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess before him. Yea, even at the last day, when all men shall stand to be judged of him, then shall they confess that he is God; then shall they confess, who live without God in the world, that the judgment of an everlasting punishment is just upon them; and they shall quake, and tremble, and shrink beneath the glance of his all-searching eye. (Mosiah 27:31)

The righteous, on the other hand, shall stand confident in their character before Him, because of the mercy of Christ, and their faith in Him that has produced the desire to repent [change character]. The *character required to be confident* in the presence of God is briefly outlined in the Doctrine and Covenants:

45 Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.

46 The Holy Ghost shall be thy constant companion, and thy scepter an unchanging scepter of righteousness and truth; and thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means it shall flow unto thee forever and ever. (D&C 121:45, 46)

Since character change is created by choice and agency, it will not come instantly, but must by the nature of human ‘agency’ take time. Because of the time and effort it will take to learn the Gospel perfectly and make the character changes desired (love God and our fellow man) it is requisite that there be ‘space between death and the resurrection’ (Alma 40:9, 21). Every one that has ever lived upon the earth must know and understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Plan of Salvation perfectly. They must acquire this knowledge without any misconceptions, or misunderstandings, that is perfect and complete before, standing in the presence God at the Judgment bar clothed in the resurrected body. If any individual does not have that perfect knowledge and understanding of the Gospel, the plan of salvation and the need for the Atonement of Christ when they stand before the bar of God, then their ‘agency’ would be compromised and any judgment would be unjust and God would cease to be God. The necessary space (time) between ‘death and the resurrection’ is a time for learning and understanding the gospel without error or the cultural and physical handicaps. All those have lived upon this earth will need to know and comprehend the plan of salvation perfectly. Every individual spirit must perfectly comprehend the benefits and the way of salvation and the requirement to come unto Christ. The spirit world is a place where all will be taught. For those who have learned and know it will be a place and time to teach. In the spirit world the Gospel of Jesus Christ will first be taught in family units and then among all spirits. Understanding the Gospel is required to be ‘judged according to men in the flesh, and live according to God in the spirit.’ Thus, the need for the sacred space of Temples. This is where the three worlds come together (the worlds of the Gods, the living, and the dead) a place where time and space cease to exist. It is here where those men with the authoritative keys of the kingdom may bind and seal on earth and in heaven, for the living and the dead.

29 And as I wondered, my eyes were opened, and my understanding quickened, and I perceived that the Lord went not in person among the wicked and the disobedient who had rejected the truth, to teach them;

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 138:29-35)

Because time is required to change character there cannot be any, so called, deathbed repentance. Repentance means to change character and this change takes time, knowledge, faith, hope and the character of charity, the pure love of Christ, the love that makes God, *God*, in order to receive a celestial resurrection.

Because of the ‘restoration’ of character that must take place for justice to demand her due, the plan of salvation requires the message and the cry to go forth to ‘repent’ (change our character). Samuel states that because of the resurrection the conditions of repentance must be chosen, or the separation from God once restored by ‘grace’ will come upon mankind again for eternity.

17 But behold, the resurrection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord.

18 Yea, and it bringeth to pass the condition of repentance, that whosoever repenteth the same is not hewn down and cast into the fire; but whosoever repenteth not is hewn down and cast into the fire; and there cometh upon them again a spiritual death, yea, a second death, for they are cut off again as to things pertaining to righteousness.

19 Therefore repent ye, repent ye, lest by knowing these things and not doing them ye shall suffer yourselves to come under condemnation, and ye are brought down unto this second death. (Helaman 14:17-19)

Conclusion

It must be understood that the demands of justice will eventually be met or paid, and the fall of Adam has been reversed. Through the grace of Christ, a restoration of immortality and a return to the presence of God is guaranteed. Those who remain in the presence of God with confidence will be ‘encircled by the arms of safety’ protecting them from the demands of justice.

16 And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption. (Alma 34:16)

The Apostle Paul presents a doctrinal phrase about ‘grace’ that is almost universally interpreted in only one way, while he uses the same words to present a seemingly contradicting conclusion of the doctrine of ‘works’ and faith. To the Ephesian members of the church, Paul writes: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians

2:8-9). Salvation is a power and gift of God! This salvation from the fall cannot be brought about by any power or ‘act’ of man nor sacrifice of beast, but only by the gift and power of Jesus Christ himself as a member of the Godhead. This ‘gift’ and ‘power’ of salvation that can only come from God, is found in the “Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16). This “power of God unto salvation” is often understood as the free gift of “grace” even if undeserved. It is free from Him (God) for all mankind, because no man has the power to save himself from sin and the fall of Adam. Therefore, all are saved by the ‘grace of God’ from the fall of Adam, and not by any action, or deed of obedience to any law of God or man. The penitent exercising faith unto repentance (our contribution to the Atonement) are saved by mercy from the demands of justice because of the Atonement.

The power is not in mankind to save themselves. It cannot be done. The power of salvation lies in the infinite and eternal sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The ‘wages of sin is death,’ death of the body and of the spirit, which is being separated from the presence of God. However, there is another salvation spoken of in the scriptures and that is a salvation that results in remaining in the presence of God based on one’s faith in the Christ and his Atonement. There is however, a requirement or personal contribution for this ‘salvation’ that is based on “mercy” rather than grace. The definition of this type of salvation is explained in the Gospel of John: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, *that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:16-17). By “grace” (the power of God) men are saved from sin and death, however, there is a contribution mankind must make to become a Christian, worthy of “everlasting life” in the presence of God. These are the ‘deeds’ or ‘works’ of character by which all shall be judged. There are no ‘works of ordinances’ that are capable of saving or exalting mankind without the character necessary for the Spirit to ‘justify, ratify and seal’ the reality the ordinances offer. The saving and exalting ordinances are a hope of a future reality as Alma explains when speaking of Melchizedek ordinances:

16 Now these ordinances were given after this manner, that thereby *the people might look forward* on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might *look forward* to him for a *remission of their sins*, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord. (Alma 13:16)

This verse is revealing a doctrine never discussed; notice that it uses a phrase twice when speaking of Melchizedek ordinances. The phrase is to “look forward to” which is defining ‘hope’ and the purpose of ordinances. “Faith” in Christ and the Atonement, “hope” of a better resurrection and ‘remission of sins’ and cleansing (through ordinances) and “charity” the character required for exaltation. If one is true and faithful in the process of changing their nature and character, putting off the natural man, the time will come that the necessary ‘works of ordinances’ will be realized. What do we do until then? The scriptures provide the purpose of life: “we see, that there was a time granted unto man to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent [*change character*] and serve God” (Alma 42:4).

The Apostle Paul continues as he speaks to the Church at Rome by declaring almost the same as he did to the Ephesians: “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Romans 11:6). Emphasizing this doctrine that “the works of the law” cannot save, Paul teaches in the epistle to the Galatians: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16). The ‘works of the law’ of which Paul speaks in the New Testament was written to the Jewish converts that had been raised in the Law of Moses that focused on performances and ordinances for salvation. Paul is teaching believers that the Grace of Christ rather than the works of ordinances and performances in the Law of Moses saves them from the fall of Adam.

As Latter-day Saints we believe the same as Paul outlined in the New Testament. The free gift of “Grace” by which all are saved is the power of the resurrection which brings all mankind back into the presence of God with an immortal physical body to be ‘judged according to their works’ of character. Thus, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world has overcome the effects of the fall. All will be resurrected and all will be brought back to God with a bright recollection of guilt. For “we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved” (Acts 15:11), “. . . for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, *after all we can do*” [which means no matter what we do] (2 Nephi 25:23).

24 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, reconcile yourselves to the will of God, and not to the will of the devil and the flesh; and remember, after ye are reconciled unto God, that it is only in and through the grace of God that ye are saved.

25 Wherefore, [by grace] may God raise you from death by the power of the resurrection, and also [by mercy] from everlasting death by the power of the atonement, that ye may be received into the eternal kingdom of God, that ye may praise him through grace divine. Amen. (2 Nephi 10:24-25)

However, to remain in the presence of God one must exercise faith unto repentance, which is an active faith in Christ and the Atonement to initiate and claim the “Mercy” that is offered to the believer. ‘All have sinned’ and come short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3:23; 5:12-13) and there can be no salvation without an infinite and eternal sacrifice to satisfy the demands of justice.

14 And behold, this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal.

15 And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance.

16 And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption.

17 Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you; (Alma 34:14-17)

The “Mercy” of God requires a change of heart, a rebirth, a new person who will bring forth personal “fruits meet for repentance”. These are the “works” by which man will be judged, when all mankind are brought back to the presence of God by His grace. Mercy satisfies the demands of justice, providing the ‘time’ necessary to develop the changes of character (repentance) by agency and choice.

Amulek explains that this process of repentance will “bring about the bowels of mercy, which overpowereth justice . . . And thus mercy” through the Atonement, will satisfy the demands of justice, and “encircles them in the arms of safety” from those demands. By ‘exercising faith unto repentance, ‘the “power of the Atonement’ will bless mankind with a ‘confidence that waxes strong’ in the presence of God as the faithful will know that the demands of ‘justice’ will be met and paid by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Speaking about those who accept or reject the gospel plan of salvation on the earth and in the hereafter, the Lord instructs Alma on Grace, Justice and Mercy.

26 And then shall they know that I am the Lord their God, that I am their Redeemer; but they would not be redeemed.

27 And then I will confess unto them that I never knew them; and they shall depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

28 Therefore I say unto you, that he that will not hear my voice, the same shall ye not receive into my church, for him I will not receive at the last day.

29 Therefore I say unto you, Go; and whosoever transgresseth against me, him shall ye judge according to the sins which he has committed; [this is the work of justice] and if he confess his sins before thee and me, and repenteth in the sincerity of his heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also. [this is the work of mercy]

30 Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me.

31 And ye shall also forgive one another your trespasses; for verily I say unto you, he that forgiveth not his neighbor's trespasses when he says that he repents, the same hath brought himself under condemnation. (Mosiah 26:26-31)

Grace is a salvation from the fall by the ‘power of the resurrection’ and provides a salvation from the physical death and the spiritual death that came upon mankind because of the choice of Adam. Grace ensures that all men will be resurrected and brought back to the presence of God. This ‘grace’ exists freely for all, it is not offered by choice, but freely given for the benefit of all mankind. "Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt" (Moses 6:54).

Justice demands a judgment based on the works of character for all mankind, the righteous as well as the wicked. Those who have not ‘come unto Christ’ and accepted His Atonement by exercising faith in His name, are not capable (by works or mercy) of remaining in the presence of God, and will be judged by the works of their character done in the flesh. These are they that will inherit a lesser kingdom of glory. Justice, (because of mercy) will have no claim upon those who have accepted Christ in faith and have repented of the works of the flesh, by putting off the natural man, seeking to change their character by loving God and their fellow man. By accepting the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with its accompanying priesthood authority and ordinances, in life or in death, the penitent may rely wholly upon the merits and power of Mercy provided by the Atonement of Christ to save them from the grasp of justice.

Mercy may only be activated by the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer. The blessing of mercy depends, one’s faith, repentance and upon a character that loves God and mankind, the two great commandments upon which hang all the law, and all the prophets have taught. If all righteousness is dependent upon the Character of charity i.e. the love of God and man, then also all judgment must be founded upon these same two character traits. These are the fruits of repentance. Mercy is a salvation from the demands of justice, as justice would consign everyone to a kingdom and glory less than the presence of God. Mercy satisfies justice through the power of the Atonement and the infinite and eternal sacrifice of Christ. Mercy provides an escape from the effects of justice, which would keep all, even the penitent from the presence of God, ‘for there is none righteous, no not one’ (Rom. 3:10). Mercy will ‘encircle the penitent in the arms of safety’ (Alma 34:16) from the demands of Justice, as all have sinned and are unworthy to dwell with God. Mercy provides the time needed for an individual to develop the *same character and love that God has*, which character must be produced or created by the agency of man, and not by compulsion or constraint. Mercy provides the time required to develop a Godly nature, character and disposition that cannot and will not sin. Mercy provides *time* to change in such a manner that one no longer need submit their ‘will to God’s will,’ but create by agency and change within themselves, the same ‘will’ as God’s will. Mercy will provide the means and *time* so that mankind may become an ‘heir and joint heir with Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 8:17) “for *we shall be like him*, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2; Moroni 7:48).

ⁱ TPJS, p. 358.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid*, p. 356, 357.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid*. p. 218, 219.

^{iv} Ibid p.357

^v *TPJS*, p.297.

^{vi} *Ibid.* p. 181.

^{vii} *Ibid.* pp. 305-306.

^{viii} *The Words of Joseph Smith*, Compiled by: Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, (Salt Lake City, Utah, Bookcraft, 1981), p. 62. Hereafter cited as: *WJS*.

^{ix} *TPJS*, p. 187, 188.

^x *TPJS* p. 216.

^{xi} *TPJS* p. 346-347.

^{xii} *TPJS* p. 348.

^{xiii} Priesthood, and Relief Society Manual, *Teachings of the Presidents of the the Church, Joseph Smith*, (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. 2007) pp. 213, 214.