

Jesus Christ Is the Truth—Repentance and Forgiveness

Repentance—Life's Great Adventure

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“Stand Forever” Episode 22

The Lord has said, “Say nothing but repentance unto this generation; keep my commandments, and assist to bring forth my work, according to my commandments, and you shall be blessed.”¹ What does that mean, *say nothing but repentance*? It is a bit perplexing because He also said to go to all the world and preach the gospel everywhere to everyone, and while repentance is an essential part of the gospel it is not the whole of it.

Hello, my name is Larry Corbridge, and this is Episode 22 of the *Stand Forever Series*. In this episode, we will unpack that scripture and repentance as a vital part of the path leading to the fulfillment of your divine potential.

In past episodes, we concluded that a purposeful life leading to the realization of your divine potential requires knowing where you are going (Point B), where and who you are now (Point A), and then charting the course in between. We determined the course is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, also known as the doctrine of Christ, including faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, ordinances, and covenants beginning with baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, enduring to the end building up the kingdom of God as an active contributing member.

In the last episode, we looked at faith in Jesus Christ. We concluded that of all the principles of redeeming truth, of all the laws of the gospel, faith in Christ is probably the one, which if more fully understood and applied, would generate the greatest return and benefit.

Faith leads us to repentance. What is repentance and how do you know if you have been forgiven?

What Is Repentance?

Synonyms for repentance might include sanctifying change or improvement. And if so, we might take the Lord’s admonition to “say nothing but repentance unto this

¹ Doctrine and Covenants 11:9

generation” as meaning “say nothing but continual improvement to become more like the Lord.”

Another less common way of thinking about repentance is as a subset of ambition. From the first attempts of an infant to feed herself or walk unaided across the room, we are all driven by a divine urge to improve. That drive is sometimes referred to as “ambition.”

It drives one to train harder, run faster or farther, ski better, jump higher, improve a golf ball swing, score more points, provide better for a family, speak better, think better, be a better spouse, parent, or grandparent, organize a closet, clean a house, mow the lawn, learn more or improve in any aspect of life. No one sets out to do or become less. No one has a goal to become dishonest or worse than before.

It is the drive that urges people to improve and ultimately realize their full divine potential. We are hardwired to improve. That drive is part of your divine DNA. It is embedded in your very being. It is universal, the same among men and women, children and adults.

Repentance is a subset of that more comprehensive, universal, divine drive to improve we call ambition. Repentance is the drive to specifically become more like the Lord. It is not an autonomic process, such as breathing or the beat of your heart, but it is as natural as eating and sleeping.

Yes, what we otherwise call “the natural man” and Satan resist change, but your divine nature is stronger and urges you to continually improve to realize the full measure of your potential. That process of refinement is repentance.

If faith in Christ is to look to Him, learn of Him, and trust Him, then repentance is to apply what you learn. It’s that simple. It is striving to align your life with His as best you know to do, your will with His as you know it, your mind with His as you know it, your heart with His as you know it, your actions with His as you know them.

If you are off course, repentance is turning back to God, making the corrections necessary to turn back on course. Jesus said, “The Father ... sent me to bless you in *turning away every one of you from your iniquities.*”²

² 3 Nephi 20:26, *emphasis added*

If you are on course, repentance is the constant vigilance and discipline to stay on course, move forward, and apply what you learn as you do. It is to advance from one degree of light and knowledge to the next, and from there to the next, and on and on. It is the glorious process of divine evolution.

Applying what you learn, exercising faith in Christ, however, is more than forsaking sin. Although repentance is usually linked with overcoming evil, its sweep is as broad as the yawning gap between who you now are and who you can become. Many of your weaknesses are not evil. They are just deficiencies—the shortfall in comparison to the Lord and your full potential. One person, for example, may have faith to be healed and another not. There are as many variations of knowledge as people, and yet everyone falls woefully short of the knowledge of God. One may be fearful and another prone to depression. Those deficiencies are not evil; they just are part of the gap.

In the process of time, all deficiencies may be resolved by the Lord and because of His Atonement by faith in Him, repentance (works), ordinances, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and staying on course engaged in God’s work. The grace of the Lord is sufficient to “make weak things become strong” in every way for those who humble themselves before Him and have faith in Him.³ But you can’t do it alone.

You may change your behavior, but you can’t change your nature on your own. You can’t undo or compensate for your sins, and you can’t lay claim to the power of God alone. You can’t do it. However great or small your sins may be, they are all sufficient to separate you from the presence and power of God forever which is *the essential problem in life*. We all need help to bridge the gap. Faith in Christ and repentance are coordinates or waypoints on the course to that help.

The Common Thread among the Greatest Deceptions

Repentance involves change which is something the natural man and Satan resist. Most of the great fallacies of life all lead to the same damning conclusion: “I don’t need to change” or in other words “I don’t need to repent.” They all have this one common denominator, to relieve man from the need to improve his thoughts and actions, permitting each to walk after the image of his own god and muddle along at no great cost. They all worship at the throne of the god of convenience, mediocrity, and ease.

Here are some of those fallacies:

³ Ether 12:27

1. There is no God, therefore, there are no absolutes, no right and wrong, and that being the case, I don't need to change.
2. God is a spirit without human attributes, form, body, parts or passions, a divine mind that permeates the universe. God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost are one god capable of being manifested in three personages, an omniscient force or a spirit that is beyond the comprehension of man. I don't need to change because I can't identify with, much less emulate, an ethereal power I cannot understand. One cannot strive to become like something that is fundamentally and eternally different from man.
3. The Atonement makes possible salvation by grace alone. All that is needed is to confess Christ in my heart. Therefore, there is no need to change.
4. All that is necessary to be saved is confession and the sacraments. Therefore, I don't need to change.
5. Some are predestined to salvation while others not. Therefore I don't need to change.
6. The afterlife is comprised of only two destinations, heaven and hell. The wicked go to hell and everybody else, the halfhearted, the indifferent, the lukewarm, along with the faithful and the valiant, all go to the only other destination, heaven. Mediocrity smugly marches into heaven with her hordes following her trampling justice as they go, and they all sit down with those that sacrificed everything, even their very lives in defense of the truth. Therefore, there is no need to knock myself out to live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God. I don't need to change.
7. There are no prophets or apostles in our day. Religious leaders today only speak of the scripture long ago revealed, and the scriptures are subject to individual interpretation. There is no one who can say today, "thus saith the Lord God." We are left to interpret, pick, and choose among what has been revealed, according to our needs and biases. Therefore, I am free to go and do as I choose and as I think best.
8. A loving God will save all his children. Therefore, I don't need to change.
9. The moral code of yesterday is antiquated, unsophisticated, and small minded. Therefore, I can live however I choose if it does not harm anyone else. I don't need to change.
10. All is lost; there is no hope. I can't change, so what's the use of trying? I can't be forgiven for all I have done. I'm bad. It's too late. Therefore, there is no reason to change.
11. I can't be perfect, so why try?
12. I'm a nobody, not good enough, and I can't attain to eternal life. Therefore there is no reason to change.
13. I can't keep the commandments, so why try?

14. I'm not worthy of God's love or to be among the saints, so there's no need to change.
15. It's not that bad, and if "we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God."⁴ Therefore, I don't need to change.
16. I'm okay just the way I am. I just need to be myself and live by my truth. Therefore, there is no need to change.
17. The Church is not true. Therefore, I don't need to change.
18. I can live the gospel on my own. I don't need the Church to tell me how to live. Therefore, I can march to the beat of my own drum, and I don't need to change.

It may be that not everyone accepts any one of those fallacies for the express purpose of avoiding change. But that is the outcome, and you can be sure Satan promotes them for that very reason. He will thwart positive change (i.e., repentance) at every turn.

Repent or Perish

Does sin alienate the Spirit or is it the failure to repent that results in spiritual death? The question may at first blush seem silly. "Of course, sin would alienate the Spirit" one might think, but if so, those of us who are prone to error would be spiritual zombies. There is scriptural support for both propositions.

As for the belief that sin causes the Spirit to withdraw, the Lord said, "he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her shall deny the faith and shall not have the Spirit; and if he repents not he shall be cast out."⁵ Does this mean, no one who has entertained an immoral thought can have the Spirit?

"The Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance"⁶ and Mormon records, "the Spirit of the Lord doth not dwell in unholy temples."⁷ King Benjamin warned, "*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 ... the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit and becometh an enemy to all righteousness.*"⁸

⁴ 2 Nephi 28:8

⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 42:23, See also 63:16

⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 1:31

⁷ Helaman 4:24

⁸ Mosiah 2:36-37, *emphasis added*

But what constitutes an “unholy temple” — any sin or is it a course of action, “going contrary” and “listening to obey the evil spirit”? Is it a single sin, or direction?

It is surprising that immoral thought is singled out in scripture as offensive to the Spirit. What about acting on those thoughts, adultery, or other immorality, or lying? Surely, if the thought alone is offensive to the Spirit, the execution of the thought is ever more so. The Lord at least has made it clear that evil thought is sufficient to alienate the Spirit, let alone the very act.

One might point to Section 121 of the Doctrine and Covenants to establish that sin alienates the Spirit, but those verses say that whenever one undertakes to *cover* his sins the Spirit is grieved and withdraws.⁹ The loss of the Spirit because of covering or duplicity is different than the withdrawal of the Spirit because of a single mistake. Hiding or covering sin seems to be especially egregious and offensive to God.

“Going contrary to that which has been spoken” and “listening to obey the evil spirit” (in the words of King Benjamin) is not a single mistake but overall direction. *Direction is extremely important.* Going in the wrong direction is the refusal to learn from mistakes and constitutes a rejection of God, making one an “enemy to God” unless “he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” which is to repent.¹⁰ Yielding to the Spirit as a natural man, an enemy to God, implies some degree of the Holy Spirit sufficient to entice.

One example in support of the second proposition (that the failure to repent results in spiritual death more than the initial mistake) is Christ’s twice repeated assertion “except ye repent, ye shall all ... perish.”¹¹ The invitation to repent and the warning that death (which I interpret to mean spiritual death) will follow without repentance presupposes two things: sin in the first place and death yet to happen.

Although catastrophic injuries can result in immediate physical death, the initial invasion of your body by a foreign agent such as cancer, virus, or bacteria usually does not result in immediate death but sets in motion a process that may cause death unless checked by some healing intervention.

In a fallen world, all are spiritually vulnerable to equally deadly foreign agents. While catastrophic sinful actions may result in immediate death, most sin is the incursion of a foreign agent that sets in motion a process that will result in spiritual death unless

⁹ Doctrine and Covenants 121:37

¹⁰ Mosiah 3:19

¹¹ Luke 13:3, 5

checked by the healing intervention of repentance and the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is also not binary, black, and white, i.e., you either have it or you don't. There are degrees of glory and degrees of spiritual power. This is supported by scriptures that speak of receiving "a fulness of the Holy Ghost."¹² A "fulness" implies lesser degrees or preliminary variations of spiritual power. Moses said in resistance to Satan, "Blessed be the name of my God, for his Spirit hath not *altogether withdrawn* from me."¹³

So, both answers are correct. Sin is hostile to the Spirit of the Lord, even evil thought, but most sin does not result in immediate cataclysmic spiritual death but sets in motion a process that will end in death without intervention. Therefore, *repent or perish*.

Confess and Forsake

The Lord said, "By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold he will confess them and forsake them."¹⁴ Those two, confessing and forsaking, are evidence of repentance but not the whole of the process.

Repentance begins with seeing, it begins with honesty which gives rise to confession to whom is appropriate. Covering sin is more offensive to God and His Spirit, than sin itself.¹⁵

A woman said of her former husband, "My previous spouse is a good man. He unfortunately became ensnared in a pornography addiction that consumed him for the majority of our marriage. This addiction caused him to self-hate and lie. His lying began to infiltrate all areas of his life, affecting our relationship, his interactions with others, his schooling, and his jobs. He was not able to maintain jobs for long, as he had difficulty being away from pornography and would often leave work to return home to view. This addiction eventually led him to stray to relationships with women outside of his marriage. In response to his behaviors, I became frustrated and impatient, which only worsened his depression and self-hate. We truly tried in the marriage however *without honesty and loyalty the relationship became too toxic* for both parties and we divorced."

¹² Doctrine and Covenants 109:15

¹³ Moses 1:15, *emphasis added*

¹⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 58:43

¹⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 121:37

Sin alone is bad enough, but it is the combination of sin and deceit, sin and covering, sin and lying that wreaks havoc in the lives of people.

A man said of his repentance, “I have never felt more at peace with my worthiness than I do now. I have never felt more honest and without baggage in my life. I’m not hiding things and feel free to worship my Heavenly Father and Savior Jesus Christ without guilt. My conversations with my Heavenly Father are more free and meaningful. They are full of gratitude and love. They are said with passion and not the feeling of remorse as they may have been in the past. Prayer is a new-found source of strength and peace at all times not just in times of need.”

Confess

Confession is to honestly own or acknowledge one’s sins. Integrity, especially about sin and weakness, is foundational. You can’t fix what you ignore, deny, or don’t see. Honesty is essential, and covering is especially harmful.

A woman said of her sins, “the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. I longed to come back to church and feel the love from all the other members and have my spirit fed. I longed to be forgiven. I knew I had to confess those ugly sins to the bishop. No matter how many prayers I said, I had to confess my sins. Finally, the day came when I had to meet with the bishop. Surprisingly, I wasn’t really afraid anymore to meet him. I had been carrying this dirty laundry far too long and I was anxious to get rid of it. We had a good meeting. I know without a doubt that he is a man of God. We discussed the path to repentance, and I left his office with such a weight lifted from my soul.”

Confession has been misunderstood, abused, and even adulterated in the religious world. As a result, some dismiss it, while many others believe it to be the sum-total of repentance. The “confess and go” mindset looks for the cheap and easy road to heaven, which is not a short-cut at all, but a dead-end. Repeated cycles of sin, confession, and sin again ignore the other primary evidence of repentance—forsaking. Eventually it becomes a mockery to God and the power of it all dissipates.

Others, equally mistaken, believe they can go it alone, live a righteous life, and pay the Lord back, without confession of serious sin. The “pay it back” mindset can claim some scriptural support, such as “thrust in your sickle with all your soul, and your sins are forgiven you.”¹⁶ When taken in isolation, that statement gives rise to a false conclusion.

¹⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 31:5

The problem with the “pay it back” mindset is Christ and His atoning sacrifice are ignored. They are not part of the equation. There may be self-made men in the earthy sense, but there is no self-made man in the godly sense. You can’t pay it back, no matter how hard you work; worlds without end you can’t pay it back. You can’t do it on your own.

I have seen that reality play out and replay over and over and over again—people who live righteous, good lives but never fully free from past mistakes, never whole, always with a critical piece missing, always the backdoor slightly ajar rattling in the wind, until finally, sometimes decades later, sometimes almost a lifetime later, they confess and finally the backdoor slams shut. The winds still blow but the door doesn’t rattle anymore and finally he sleeps soundly through the night. Confession is essential. I don’t know why that is true, I just know it is. Maybe it’s essential because it forges integrity.

Forsake

Forsaking is enabled by confession. It has two different dimensions, forsaking sin and forsaking the past. The first dimension, to forsake sin, is to stop sinful behavior and start better behavior. It is a course correction turning to God.

One of the most disheartening things about reading the life stories of so many people while serving on the Restoration and Cancellation Committee, is not that some people commit serious sins, but they repeat them time and time again. They don’t turn. It is the pattern of unrighteousness in a continuous downward spiral that is so damaging. It is easier to avoid getting into the downward spiral than to pull out of it once you are headed down.

The word most often used in the Old Testament for repentance is “turning.” Ezekiel recorded, “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: *turn ye, turn ye* from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”¹⁷

Speaking to King Agrippa, Paul said the Lord gave him a charge relative to people to whom he would be sent “to open their eyes and to *turn them from darkness to light, and*

¹⁷ Ezekiel 33:1, 10-11, *emphasis added*

from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”¹⁸

Forsaking involves turning. It sounds simple enough, but it is a monstrous labor, especially when trying to kill the dragons of addiction. They are like the evil monsters of movies who, after being pounded into the ground and blown to bits, rise again out of the flames as soon as you turn your back.

You want to win. You want to stop. But after so many battles, you become exhausted and may tragically conclude you can’t, thinking you’re just too tired, you’ve battled too long, you’re not strong enough as your sword slips from your hand and the dragons turn to eat you alive.

The problem is you’re trying to do it on your own, and on your own you’re right, you’re not strong enough, the dragons are too big, and you can’t win—not alone. *The plan has never been to go alone.* You need the help of heaven and probably the help and support of others as well. Confession not only engages the help of trusted others such as a priesthood leader, spouse, or parent, and trusted counselors, but it also opens the door wide to receive heaven’s help.

Most people think of forsaking in the first sense (forsaking sin), but the second dimension (forsaking the past) is equally important but less understood. This part of forsaking also involves turning, but not from sin, rather turning to look ahead. We are debilitated merely by remembering sins, let alone returning to them again. Part of the awfulness of sin is the corrosive effect it may have, even after repentance and forgiveness.

A man seeking to have all his blessings restored as a member of the Church said, “I struggled for a long time regarding feeling worthy—even when I was on the straight and narrow. Honestly, in the past, some of my most depressing times were when I was the most spiritual—odd I know. I hung on too much to my past and let Satan creep in and convince me I will never be worthy. This has scared me for years, and I felt like I shouldn’t get too spiritual because of the depression I often would fall into—which is why it has taken me so long to get to the point I am at now. I truly have a testimony of the Atonement—whereas, before, I honestly don’t think I did—otherwise I would have rejoiced in the spirit.”

¹⁸ Acts 26:18

Another man lost his membership in the Church because of adultery. After several years he repented and was rebaptized, but even still he could not forgive himself and languished for decades longer without doing what was needed to have all his blessings restored. What a tragedy! Surely the Lord forgave Him long ago, but he would not do the same. He forsook his sins, but he did not forsake the past. In the meantime, life passed him by not because he wasn't worthy but because he wouldn't believe it. He missed out being the priesthood leader he could have been for his children and grandchildren, had he forgiven himself and put away the past.

Remorse for sin is part of repentance, but it has never been the plan of Our Father to wallow in it forever. Christ suffered in Gethsemane for that very reason, that we not suffer as He. It makes no sense to refuse Christ's payment only to pay the same debt again. Double payment is just as foolish as non-payment.

Alma recorded, "And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul. And it came to pass that as I was thus racked with torment, while *I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins*, behold, I remembered also to have heard my father prophesy unto the people concerning the coming of one Jesus Christ, a Son of God, to atone for the sins of the world. Now, as my mind caught hold upon this thought, I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death. And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, *I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more*. And oh, what joy, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain!"¹⁹ Alma was able to put away the past and become a fruitful servant of the Lord.

You can't move forward looking back. "And Jesus said ... No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."²⁰ Direction is extremely important. It is far more important to be on course than how far along you are at any point in time.

Forgiveness is not forgetting, nor not regretting. God says He remembers your sins no more when you repent; at least they are no longer a deterrent or an issue with Him. It is with Him as though they had never happened *insofar as worthiness goes*, but not so with us.

¹⁹ Alma 36:16-21

²⁰ Luke 9:62

By remembering and regretting, you find it harder to believe in yourself, which weakens your faith. And the more you have to forget, the harder it is to believe, especially to believe in yourself. That is part of the awfulness of sin. Even when you repent, even when you are forgiven, the natural tendency is to insist on suffering more, believing you don't and can't measure up. And when you believe that, Satan still wins. If he cannot entice you to return to wallow again in the mire, the next best thing is to undermine your confidence today because you were once in the mire and either way he wins.

There is a difference between the regret of past sins for which you have repented and the crushing burden of unresolved sin. If you remember and regret your sins, it doesn't mean you haven't repented or been forgiven. It only means you are human with cognitive abilities greater than your cat. To an extent you are schooled by failure, and failure is never really failure until you quit or refuse to learn from it. By remembering the good and the bad, you are more fully informed to sail ahead.

Forsaking, therefore, is not only stopping sinful behavior and starting better behavior, but also putting away the past. You won't forget. Face your past honestly, as painful as it may be, but don't be its victim. Don't let it claim you, otherwise you deny Christ. You deny that His suffering is sufficient to meet the demands of justice. You insist on suffering more and continue to kick yourself around the ranch. The Lord said, "For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent."²¹

Look to the past long enough to learn and repent, and then turn around, look ahead, and go. If you have repented, if you have done all you can do, shut the backdoor. That's part of forsaking. Otherwise, it's all for naught—all of Christ's suffering and all of your suffering, all in vain, all for naught. Let it go. Shut the door. That's the second dimension of forsaking.

Forgiveness and "the Law of Restoration"

There is great power in forgiveness; power when God forgives us and power when we forgive others. To be forgiven, we must forgive. Jesus taught, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."²²

²¹ Doctrine and Covenants 19:16, *emphasis added*

²² Matthew 6:14-15

Alma uniquely taught what he alone called “the law of restoration.” He said, “For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored.”²³ Isaiah said, “the righteous ... shall eat the fruit of their doings.”²⁴ You receive what you give. That is an absolute, vital truth.

Forgive to be forgiven is one expression of that truth. Here are a few others:

- “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.”²⁵
- “For what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”²⁶
- “Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? *Is it* not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rearward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, *Here I am.* ... And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.”²⁷
- “For behold, the same that judgeth rashly shall be judged rashly again; for according to his works shall his wages be; therefore, he that smiteth shall be smitten again, of the Lord.”²⁸
- “For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels.”²⁹
- “For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again and be restored.”³⁰

We create our own heaven or hell. We build it. We lay each stone of the foundation. We place the floor and raise the walls. We hammer every nail. We place each shingle. If there are flowers in the window box, it is because we planted them. We build our

²³ Alma 41:15, *emphasis added*

²⁴ Isaiah 3:10

²⁵ Matthew 5:7

²⁶ Matthew 7:2

²⁷ Isaiah 58:6-11

²⁸ Mormon 8:19

²⁹ Luke 9:26

³⁰ Alma 41:15

own house. We receive what we give. What awaits us is not so much reward as the product of our own construction, the reflection of our life, the reproduction there of our life here. That is the law of restoration.

God stands ready to help us as we help others. Part of that truth relates to forgiveness. He will forgive us as we forgive others. “Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; *for there remaineth in him the greater sin.*”³¹ Jesus said to forgive any one “seventy times seven” which is always.³² Forgiving others should not be confused, however, with condoning, overlooking, ignoring, or enabling sin.

“The Process of Repentance” and the Process of Redemption

People are often more concerned about the outward consequences of sin than the far more devastating spiritual fallout. They are more focused on the consequences of Church membership limitations or withdrawal than the consequences of sin, particularly spiritual death. And, in the minds of many, repentance has more to do with compliance with the conditions of Church discipline than what is necessary to be forgiven by Heavenly Father because of the intervention of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a phrase people often use when speaking of repentance that is misleading and harmful. They refer to “the process of repentance.” That’s the phrase. On its face it’s fine, although not scriptural. Repentance is a process, but not formulaic. When people say they “went through the process of repentance,” what they usually mean is they complied with the requirements and conditions of Church discipline rather than what the Lord requires for redemption. They may assume they are one and the same, but that’s a mistake.

The process of Church discipline includes confession to a common judge, such as a bishop, stake president, or mission president; submission to any informal or formal limitations of membership privileges, compliance with the conditions to recover those privileges, leading to their ultimate restoration.

That is what people usually mean by “the process of repentance.” But godly sorrow, forsaking, restitution, fasting and prayer, the Atonement, and even the Lord Jesus Christ are not expressly in that sequence. They may be added, and hopefully so, but they are ancillary, and the administrative process may overshadow redemption.

³¹ Doctrine and Covenants 64:9, *emphasis added*

³² Matthew 18:22

A stake president commented about a man's preparation to have membership restrictions lifted saying, "He acted like a normal member; he would always fast and pray for forgiveness from the Lord for his actions." I wonder if that is in fact what most "normal members" do? Are they focused on the consequences of sin or the consequences of membership restrictions? Are they focused on doing what is necessary to regain the Spirit of God or good standing in the Church? Both are important and they should coincide to some extent but do not always, and "the process of repentance" without redemption is form without substance. The Church does not dispense redemption; the Lord does that.

Repentance and Church Membership Councils

As the Lord said to Alma, the process of restricting or withdrawing Church membership is to "regulate all the affairs of the Church."³³ Regulating the affairs of the Church is important to protect the innocent, help people repent, and protect the good name of the Church. Confession, personal counseling, informal membership restrictions, and Church membership councils facilitate and encourage forsaking and are a great blessing to people who are penitent. There is a beginning and an end to the process that can structure and greatly aid repentance, which is otherwise unstructured. That structure confers a sense of integrity, submission, and completion enabling one to close more easily the backdoor.

After a long stretch of infidelity and suffering, a woman spoke with her bishop. She said, "I told him everything. My transgressions were serious enough to lead to my disfellowshipment. This is the moment that turned my life around. I no longer had any desire to engage in immoral behavior. In fact, it was a sickening thought and I wished never to return to that life again. This is the biggest miracle of all to me is how God can heal us when we lay our burdens at His feet."

One might think there is a great inequity in the Church—that while members who are active or partially active experience restrictions or withdrawal of membership, a great many members of the Church fly under the radar living lives of wild abandon in flagrant disregard to the commandments of God without institutional consequence. That view, however, derives from the mistaken perception of Church discipline as negative, when in truth it is intended to be positive. Applied under the inspiration of heaven, it disrupts the routine, upsets the applecart, breaks patterns, upsets a

³³ Mosiah 26:29, 32-37

complacent or destructive status quo, and helps people turn. It helps people turn their lives around, hopefully turn to the Lord, which is frequently the result.

The lack of Church intervention can be very harmful. Not only may the transgressor continue to suffer the ill effects of unresolved sin, but innocent people (especially a faithful spouse or children) may well continue to suffer the collateral damage of another's sins only for want of Church intervention. One of its primary purposes is to protect the innocent, but without any intervention the innocent may continue to suffer. There always are consequences, and the consequences of no consequences can be devastating.

How to Know If You've Been Forgiven.

Finally, how can you know if you've been forgiven? That is a good question, but not the best question. Many great souls have hungered to know their standing before God. We all need to know that. It is part of what drove Joseph Smith into the grove to pray on a spring morning. It is what caused Enos to pray all day and into the night. It is what caused Isaiah to doubt himself. It is what caused Alma to be "racked, even with the pains of a damned soul for three days and nights."³⁴ In addition to the First Vision, the Lord assured Joseph Smith his sins were forgiven on at least three separate occasions.³⁵

In almost every instance, when the Lord declared "thy sins are forgiven thee," He followed with "go to work." When people can stop worrying about their standing before God, when they can forsake the past and forget about themselves, they are able to go to work and focus on others. Then they can become fruitful.

The worry about one's standing before God is similar to the third pillar of the foundation of faith, i.e., to have an actual knowledge the course you are pursuing is acceptable to God. It is a valid concern, but people waste far too much energy and time worrying about whether or when they have been or will be forgiven. While they are fussing over whether they have been or will be forgiven, life passes by.

If you are on course and moving forward, you will be forgiven, if you haven't been already, and you will attain to eternal life, if you stay the course. That's all you need to know.

³⁴ Alma 36:16

³⁵ Doctrine and Covenants 29:3; 60:7; 90:11

The better question is not, “Have I been forgiven?” rather, “Am I on course?” Forgiveness—whether yesterday, today, or tomorrow—doesn’t matter if you are on course. If you are and if you are not covering sin, you may have full confidence before the Lord. The Lord said: “He that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven.”³⁶ It will happen, so don’t worry about it and go to work.

A similar question is, “Have I done enough to repent?” The answer is the same: Are you on course and moving forward? If so, you will do enough if you haven’t already. The Spirit will show you all things you should do.³⁷ If there are apologies that need saying, He will tell you. If there is restitution that needs to be made, He will tell you. If there is something unresolved, the Lord will tell you. If you are honest, if you ask and if you listen, the Lord will tell you. And when He does, do it.

Life’s Great Adventure

Faith without repentance is dead and profits nothing. If you are off course, turn to get on course. Look to the past long enough to learn and repent, and then turn around and look ahead. Be vigilant and disciplined to stay on course. Repent to be born again and then stay alive from day to day. Forgive all others that you may be forgiven. Don’t think of repentance as a series of steps or elements to check off. Faith in Christ is to look to Him, learn of Him, and trust Him. Repentance is to apply what you learn. It’s that simple.

We have all sinned and “come short of the glory of God.”³⁸ Our sins separate us from the presence and power of God, which is the essential problem in life. We all have need for redemption. We all have weaknesses. We all need to be strengthened. As long as we draw breath, we will have need to repent because as long as we live, we have need for God’s Son, His Spirit, and His life. It doesn’t end, at least any time soon, if ever. It is life’s great adventure.

In the next episode, we will focus on baptism and ordinances as essential coordinates/waypoints along the path to eternal life and every good thing between there and here. I hope you will join me then.

³⁶ Doctrine and Covenants 1:32

³⁷ 2 Nephi 32:5

³⁸ Romans 3:23-24