

# The Healing Power of Christ

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In 1971 the eminent historian Arnold Toynbee wrote a book titled *Surviving the Future*. He expresses concern about the inequality of man's scientific and technological advances compared with his spiritual progress. He refers to this inequality as a "morality gap." He is convinced that this gap has been growing wider and that technology has been making cumulative progress while morality has been stagnating.

Dr. Toynbee observes:

*Science has never superseded religion, and it is my expectation that it never will supersede it. . . . Science has shown no signs that it is going to be able to cope with man's most serious problems. It has not been able to do anything to cure man of his sinfulness and his sense of insecurity, or to avert the painfulness of failure and the dread of death. Above all, it has not helped him to break out of the prison of his inborn self-centeredness into communion . . . with some reality that is greater, more important, more valuable, and more lasting than the individual himself. [Quoted by Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (N.Y.: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973), p. 227]*

He is convinced that man's basic problem is selfishness.

## The Root of Man's Problems

Two years after Toynbee's work was published, Dr. Karl Menninger, the famous psychiatrist, wrote his popular book, *Whatever Became of Sin?* His motivation for writing the book was the alarm he felt because a growing number of clergymen were becoming discouraged in their ministries. "One distraction of the modern clergy," he wrote, "is the multiplication of methods for dealing with troubled people: psychoanalysis and other psychotherapies" (Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* p. 224). He also acknowledges basic selfishness as the root of man's problems, and is concerned that "neither the clergy nor the behavioral scientists, including psychiatrists, have made it an issue" (Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* pp. 227-28).

What I hear both these men saying is that science and technology are moving ahead of religion and yet the sciences cannot solve our

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most serious problem—the human problem—which is rooted in man himself.

Menninger argues that there is a solution—man must change. But the people who can help, the clergy and social scientists, are ignoring the core issue. He further affirms:

*The popular leaning is away from notions of guilt and morality. . . . Disease and treatment have been the watchwords of the day and little is said about selfishness or guilt or the “morality gap.” And certainly no one talks about sin! . . .*

*. . . Clergymen have a golden opportunity to prevent some of the accumulated misapprehensions, guilt, aggressive action, and other roots of later mental suffering and mental disease.*

*How? Preach! Tell it like it is. Say it from the pulpit. Cry it from the housetops.*

*What shall we cry?*

*Cry comfort, cry repentance, cry hope. Because recognition of our part in the world of transgression is the only remaining hope. [Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* p. 288]*

Doesn't this challenge remind you of the words of Alma, that great missionary, who had so joyfully experienced that marvelous redeeming love of the Savior when he had repented of his sins?

*O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people!*

*Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth. [Alma 29:1–2]*

In order for us to appreciate the unique gift of repentance and the plan of redemption, let us review the circumstances which created such a need.

### Consequences of Disobedience

As the descendants of our first parents in the flesh, Adam and Eve, we have inherited the consequences of their disobediences to God's law. One consequence was spiritual death, which meant that Adam and Eve and their posterity would be banished from the presence of God, to die as to the things of the spirit. They also became mortal when partaking of the forbidden fruit, subjected to physical deterioration, weakness, and, finally, physical death.

By themselves, Adam and Eve were powerless to rectify the situation. The tempter's beguiling influence had caused sin and death to impede man's eternal progression. Lest they partake of the tree of life and live forever in their sins, the Lord God mercifully placed cherubim and the flaming sword to guard the tree so that Adam and Eve would be given a period of mortal probation, providing them with the opportunity to repent and be reconciled with God.

### To Satisfy the Demands

By covenant, in the premortal existence, Jehovah, the First Begotten of the Father, demonstrating the highest expression of love for our Father and his brother and sisters, offered himself as the Redeemer of fallen man. He did so willingly, as a divine sacrifice, to satisfy the demands of the broken law. Adam should have paid such a penalty but was unable to do so. It required a god—an infinite sacrifice by one who was entirely guiltless—whose motives were pure and free from desires for personal aggrandizement, one whose only motive was to glory the Father.

The heavens resounded with joy and thanksgiving. We were there. We enthusiastically sustained Jehovah, our Savior. We learned that, although mortality would be a severe trial, the means would be provided to see us through to our eternal destiny. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the glad tidings, the

plan of salvation which enables us to return to our Heavenly Father purified and redeemed.

After having the plan of salvation revealed to him in a mighty vision, Joseph the Prophet declared:

*This is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—*

*That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness. [D&C 76:40–41]*

To be redeemed from physical death, Jesus provided immortality through the resurrection of the body. Just as the fall of Adam was universal in nature, affecting all mankind, so is the Resurrection. All mankind is entitled to be resurrected. Justice demands it. We had nothing to do with the act which subjected us to mortal death, and we alone are incapable of overcoming death. We therefore should not be penalized for it.

### **Redemption from the Effects of Sin**

Deliverance from spiritual death is another matter. Not only was satisfaction to be made for the transgression of Adam, but a redemption was also provided from the effects of men's individual sins. Spiritual rebirth is extended to us as an act of mercy by a loving Father. He has placed certain conditions upon those who would qualify. As Father Lehi taught,

*Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer. [1 Nephi 10:6]*

*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. [2 Nephi 2:7]*

Alma also persuasively taught the plan of redemption to his errant missionary son Corianton in Alma 42:

*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. . . .*

*Now, there was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto man. . . .*

*But there is . . . 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. . . .*

*But . . . 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.*

*For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved. [Alma 42:15, 18, 22–24]*

### **Christ's Suffering**

Let us consider for a moment the incredible price paid by our Savior. It is beyond our mental capacity to understand it completely. We come closer to comprehending it through the Spirit. President John Taylor insightfully shares with us his perception of Christ's suffering. Perhaps we can gain some feeling for it.

*Groaning beneath this concentrated load, this intense, incomprehensible pressure, this terrible exaction of Divine justice, from which feeble humanity shrank, and through the agony thus experienced sweating great drops of blood, He was led to exclaim, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass*

from me.” . . . His mind surcharged with agony and pain, lonely and apparently helpless and forsaken, in his agony the blood oozed from His pores. Thus rejected by His own, attacked by the powers of darkness, and seemingly forsaken by His God, on the cross He bowed beneath the accumulated load, and cried out in anguish, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!” When death approached to relieve Him from His horrible position, a ray of hope appeared through the abyss of darkness with which He had been surrounded, and in a spasm of relief, seeing the bright future beyond, He said, “It is finished! Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” As a God, He descended below all things; . . . as a man, He grappled with all the circumstances incident to His sufferings in the world. . . . He struggled with and overcame the powers of men and devils, of earth and hell combined; and aided by this superior power of the Godhead, He vanquished death, hell and the grave, and arose triumphant as the Son of God, the very eternal Father, the Messiah, the Prince of peace, the Redeemer, the Savior of the world. [John Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Co., 1892), pp. 150–51]

Is it any wonder that the Father proclaimed, “This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17; see also 3 Nephi 11:7)? Can such an offering be taken lightly? B. H. Roberts answers:

*The severity of the atonement should impress men with the fact that we live in a world of stern realities; that human actions draw with them tremendous consequences that may not be easily set aside if the actions in which they have their origin are wrong.*

*Moral laws have their penalties and physical laws have their consequences; . . . Violations of moral law are attended by shame and suffering. Suffering is the consequence or the penalty of violating divine moral law; and the penalty must be paid either by the one sinning or by another who shall*

*suffer vicariously for him and make satisfaction to the law.*

*Man, when he sins by breaking the laws of God . . . commits a crime against divine law . . . against the majesty of God; and thereby dishonors him. [B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, and the Life*, unpublished manuscript, chapter 43]*

To many Church members, salvation is an escape from a penalty of sin rather than deliverance from sinfulness. Salvation is more than forgiveness from past sins only. Christ, in his mercy, extends his healing power to purge our desire to sin and to purify us from carnal and sensual appetites, so that the very thought of sin may be abhorrent to us.

#### **“A Mighty Change in Our Hearts”**

An example of this is recorded in the fifth chapter of Mosiah. When the people of Benjamin heard his powerful discourse on the plan of redemption and were converted, they testified that the Lord “has wrought a mighty change . . . in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2).

Faith unto repentance is God’s supernal gift. It is spiritual manna. It fills us with hope and anticipation of deliverance because we are weak and subject to the enticements of the flesh. We do not overcome all our bad habits and gain mastery of the flesh and the sophistries of Satan with simple effort and halfhearted attempts. We must learn the process of faith unto repentance, which leads to forgiveness, if we are to have peace in our hearts.

Elder Orson F. Whitney reminds us:

*Repentance is not that superficial sorrow felt by the wrongdoer when “caught in the act”—a sorrow not for sin, but for sin’s detection. Chagrin is not repentance. Mortification and shame alone bring no change of heart toward right feeling and right living. Even remorse is not all there is to repentance. In highest meaning and fullest measure, repentance*

is equivalent to reformation; the beginning of the reformatory process being a resolve to “sin no more.” [Roy W. Doxey, *Latter-day Prophets and the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1964). II: 257]

Elder Nephi Jensen adds:

*Faith unto repentance is the great eternal saving principle. Faith unto repentance cleanses the mind, purifies the heart, chastens the affections, nerves the will with resolute strength to conquer evil, and ennobles and perfects character.* [Nephi Jensen, *The World’s Greatest Need* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1950), p. 63]

### Three Essential Steps

We have learned various formulas for repentance. But repentance is more than words just to be given lip service. Repentance is an arduous journey from darkness to light. There are at least three essential steps we must follow once we have acknowledged our guilt and desire forgiveness. The first is godly sorrow, the second is confession to proper authority, and the third is the making of a new covenant.

#### Godly Sorrow

When we truly repent, we experience godly sorrow. We are brought down to the depths of humility. We realize that we cannot cure ourselves; we must have divine help. Then do we reach up to our Lord for deliverance. As President Kimball observes:

*When a true consciousness of guilt finally settles down upon the one who has sinned and he feels the heaviness of it—its throttling force and crushing power—only then can the sinner begin to realize how powerless he is on his own to rid himself of his transgressions.* [Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Inc., 1969), p. 339]

The Apostle Paul, who testified as a living witness of the grace of God, admonished the Corinthian Saints:

*Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* [2 Corinthians 7:1]

I love that phrase, “perfecting holiness in the fear of God”—“fear” meaning our profound love and admiration for God.

Paul had chastised them in a previous epistle; and they were sorry. He explained to them that there are varying degrees of sorrow.

*Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, . . .*

*For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation . . . but the sorrow of the world worketh death.* [2 Corinthians 7:9–10]

When one has reached such a degree of humility that he realizes his complete dependency upon God, his soul is filled with love. He experiences communion with God and begins to feel a sanctifying power purging the soul. Only a consummate love for God can cleanse the mind, purify the heart, and deliver the soul from sinful disposition.

The road back is steep and difficult. The purging experience brings anguish of soul while justice exacts its measure. Pride and self-justification become part of the struggle between the spirit and the flesh. Satan does not give up easily. He knows that sin is bondage and he tries to convince us that we cannot fight the battle and win. He knows that sin enslaves the sinner by making him love sinful things. He knows that the only power that can take the love of sinful practice out of our hearts is complete and sincere repentance by one who loves the Lord—one whose faith in God will sustain him.

Typically the anguish of the transgressor is not limited to himself alone, neither is the sustaining power of prayer and faith. Parents, husbands, wives, and family all suffer and rejoice together.

May I share an experience which has touched my heart. Some years ago a young priesthood leader committed a serious moral transgression. A Church court was held and it was determined that it was necessary for him to be excommunicated. It was a severe blow to him and devastating for his family. The months that followed were hard to bear; the adjustment was overwhelming. His wife and family and parents shared in the humiliation. Many sleepless nights followed. Doubts, frustrations, and petitions to a merciful Heavenly Father occupied their waking hours.

For one full year, every Sunday, the man's loving father drove forty miles to the home of his son, where he conducted a father's personal interview. The spirit of love and compassion prevailed during these meetings. It was a time for encouragement, not condemnation; a time for instruction, the sharing of scripture and teachings of the living prophets; and a time for constant reassurance that he knew his son would have the courage to persevere.

Many fasts and much petitioning and special blessings by priesthood leaders provided his wife and family the strength to support and sustain him during his travail. At one time the young father had such a promising future in his occupation and in Church leadership. Now suddenly, his whole world had changed and he had to bear new, almost insurmountable burdens. Even with all his family support the young man knew that he personally had to walk the path of repentance.

One night, after many months had passed since the court action, he had a dream. He found that he was in the company of the priesthood leaders of his stake and each was building a tower made of bricks. The young man was proud of his skill in laying brick and he

was pleased that he could build his tower faster and higher than his brethren.

Suddenly the tower began to reel and crumble. Vividly and frighteningly, he felt the excruciating pain of the bricks falling on top of him. Frantically he struggled. How could he be rescued in time? He was fighting for air. Just as he was losing consciousness, his brethren pulled him from the rubble. He was saved.

He felt relieved and grateful and terribly ashamed. He said, "Brethren, I have been a fake. I have been building a tower with inferior materials and inferior workmanship. I was driven by the desire to build faster and higher than anyone and now I've failed."

He inquired of his brethren, "Can I start again? Is it possible for me to build another tower?" They said, "Yes, you can build another tower, but you'll have to scrape each brick clean. You must be certain that next time you build solidly and carefully and follow true construction principles."

He started from this dream in a cold sweat. It had been a portentous experience. He awakened his wife and told her of his dream. It was a time of deep emotion. This was the turning point. With strong resolve, he committed himself to a course of total repentance.

This story was told to the presiding brethren of the priesthood court some years later, when it had convened to consider his rebaptism. He bore his testimony of the mercy of God and the healing power of Christ. He had vividly experienced godly sorrow. He felt the Lord had accepted his offering. He now bore witness to the presiding brethren that he had truly repented of his sins, was willing to take upon him the name of Christ, and would serve him in righteousness. He expressed deep appreciation for the love of his wife, parents, and family, who stood beside him and sustained him through his ordeal.

Those who have traveled such a road would counsel us not to take repentance lightly. We must not gamble with the attitude that any time

we want to be forgiven, we'll just turn it over to the Lord and let him handle it for us. Only those who have experienced godly sorrow know what is required to work repentance unto salvation.

### *Confession To Proper Authority*

The next step in the process is appropriate confession. We must confess to the proper authority, who acts in behalf of the Church. The Lord has revealed a judicial process, founded upon love and equity, which meets the demands of justice but is tempered with mercy.

The question may be asked, "Why is confession necessary?"

First of all, the Lord commands it (see D&C 19:20; 58:42–43). Second, the offender cannot live with a lie in his heart and have peace of mind and enjoy the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

The confession must be complete. It is like going to the dentist to have a tooth filled. All of the decay must be removed. If any remains, the infection will fester and you must repeat the procedure until it is done right.

To whom should confession be made? President Stephen L. Richards explains:

*[First,] to the Lord, of course, whose law has been violated. [Second,] to the aggrieved person or persons, as an essential in making due retribution if that is necessary. [Third,] to the Lord's representative, his appointed judge in Israel, under whose ecclesiastical jurisdiction the offender lives and holds membership in the Kingdom.*

*Is the offender justified in by-passing his immediate Church authority and judge, and going to those who do not know him so well to make his confession? Almost universally, I think the answer should be No, for the local tribunals are in position to know the individual, his history [and circumstances]. . . [I]t is the order of the Church for confessions to be made to the Bishop. [Conference Report, 3 April 1954, pp. 11–12]*

To be a bishop is a most humbling experience. The bishop is given certain keys significant to his calling as a judge in Israel. He holds a sacred trust to keep, in utmost confidence, information which is divulged to him. Under no circumstance must that trust be violated. If he were to do so, he would be guilty before God.

My young brothers and sisters, if any of you are carrying in your heart serious sins which have not been confessed to your bishop, may I implore you—do not let another day pass without contacting him. It is difficult to face up to this responsibility, but why carry such a heavy burden a day longer than is necessary? I have had so many experiences with people who have lived with a tortured soul for years, hoping that time would solve the problem or not wanting to come to grips with the problem.

I received a call one day from a sweet sister who asked, "Bishop, is it possible to be forgiven of adultery?"

I said, "Yes, under proper conditions of repentance."

She said, "I have not had a peaceful night's sleep for 15 years." Such a pity for her to have so many years of unhappiness!

Call your bishop on the telephone and say, "Bishop, I have a problem." He understands that language. He will sit down with love and compassion and explain to you what is necessary for you to do.

There are some people who feel there are other alternatives to confession. They would like to go from first base to third base and skip second, feeling that perhaps they could substitute service in the Church rather than have to confess. Others have increased their financial contributions to the Church, thinking that this would suffice. I don't know of any exceptions—one cannot gain true peace of mind without going to the official representative of the Lord and placing the matter in his hands for judgment.

### **Making A New Covenant**

The third step is to make a new covenant with the Lord. We say, “Heavenly Father, if thou wilt forgive me and give me another chance, I will love thee with all my heart. I will take upon me the name of thy Son and covenant with thee to keep thy commandments and serve thee until the end.” He has promised that, if we have fully repented, he will remember our sins no more (see D&C 58:42).

One who has felt his redeeming love must, like Alma, labor without ceasing to bring souls unto repentance, “that I might bring them to taste of the exceeding joy of which I did taste; that they might also be born of God, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Alma 36:24).

The prophet Joseph Smith said, “The nearer we get to our Heavenly Father, the more we are disposed to look with compassion on perishing souls; we feel that we want to take them upon our shoulders, and cast their sins behind our backs” (*Teachings*, p. 241).

Besides sharing the glad tidings of the gospel, we should look for opportunities to render true Christian service. Develop a sensitive awareness for the poor and the needy. Cheer up the discouraged. Strengthen the weak. Share of your resources without expecting recognition and reward. For with what measure we have received the love of God, should we not share with those in need?

Each of us needs to repent. Each of us has old habits to break and new ones to form. No one of us has completely mastered the flesh.

### **The Saving Power of Christ**

Now, all serious sins are not moral transgressions. Some people are held captive by the sin of hatred, or that of bitterness or an unforgiving heart; some have stolen, lied, and cheated. Each leaves an open wound. It will remain unhealed unless we come to terms with the Divine Healer through sincere repentance. For those who may refuse his invitation of

redemption, it will be for them as if Christ had not atoned for their sins.

My dear brothers and sisters, I came to appreciate the saving power of Christ, his great atonement, when I gained some comprehension of the heavy price which he paid for you and for me and for all sons and daughters of God who will come unto him. I gained an appreciation for my value as a human being by realizing what it cost him to purchase my salvation. “Hereby perceive we the love of God,” said John, “because he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16).

B. H. Roberts explained:

*When the plan of redemption is contemplated with reference to what it cost the Christ, . . . then we must set a higher value even upon physical life hereafter, for it was in order to bring to pass the resurrection of man to physical life and to make that life immortal that Christ suffered and died.*

*New glory must [also] attach hereafter to spiritual life, perpetual union between soul of man and soul of God. . . . We must have a deeper reverence for the love of God and the love of Christ for man and higher regard for man himself, since God so loved him; for it was to give a manifestation of that love that the Christ suffered and died. [B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, and the Life*]*

A few years ago, Sister Clarke and I visited the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem. We had a wonderful spiritual confirmation of that hallowed ground upon which we stood. This is the most famous burial site in all the world, significant because it was the sepulcher in which the mortal body of Jesus was laid. But it is remembered and revered as absolutely unique, because this tomb is empty. Its occupant is risen. He arose victorious over death and sits in majesty with his Eternal Father. And, because he has risen, so shall we.

As we approach Eastertime, we stand in humble reverence as we witness the reality of his resurrection. We declare in words of

soberness and certainty that Jesus is the Christ, the Redeemer of the world, the only name under heaven by which mankind may be saved. We testify that he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, that no one can come unto the Father except through him.

I testify that he is the Divine Healer of men's troubled souls. I testify that he knows us and that he loves us and he is ever ready to extend his arm of mercy to you and me. I know that my Redeemer lives, and I bear this witness, solemnly and humbly, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.