

## President Boyd K. Packer

This matter of sustaining the officers is a great protection to the Church. The Lord commanded "that it shall not be given to any one to go forth to preach my gospel, or to build up my church, except he be ordained by some one who has authority, and it is known to the church that he has authority and has been [duly] ordained by the heads of the church."<sup>1</sup> In this way members of the Church in every organization all over the world know who the true messengers are.

### Healing the spiritual pain of guilt

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

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

John said, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."<sup>2</sup> Then he said it more strongly: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make [the Lord] a liar, and his word is not in us."<sup>3</sup>

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

But guilt can be harder to bear than physical pain. Physical pain is nature's warning system that signals something needs to be changed or cleansed or treated, perhaps even removed by surgery. Guilt, the pain of our conscience, cannot be healed the same way.

### Descriptions of the pain of guilt

If you are burdened with depressing feelings of guilt or disappointment, of

failure or shame, there is a cure. My intent is not to hurt your tender feelings but to help you and help those you love. The prophets teach how painful guilt can be. As I read what they have said, be prepared for *very* strong words. Even so, I will not read the strongest things they have said.

The prophet Alma, describing his feelings of guilt, said, "I was *racked* with eternal *torment*, for my soul was *harrowed up* to the greatest degree and *racked* with all my sins."<sup>4</sup>

The prophets chose very graphic words.

*Racked* means "tortured."<sup>5</sup> Anciently a rack was a framework on which the victim was laid with each ankle and wrist tied to a spindle which could then be turned to cause unbearable pain.

A harrow is a frame with spikes through it. When pulled across the ground, it rips and tears into the soil. The scriptures frequently speak of souls and minds being "harrowed up" with guilt.<sup>6</sup>

*Torment* means "to twist," a means of torture so painful that even the innocent would confess.<sup>7</sup>

The prophets speak of the "gall of bitterness"<sup>8</sup> and often compare the pain of guilt to fire and brimstone. *Brimstone* is another name for sulfur.

King Benjamin said that those who are evil will be "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."<sup>9</sup>

The Prophet Joseph Smith said: "A man is his own tormentor and his own condemner. . . . The torment of disappointment in the mind of man [or woman] is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone."<sup>10</sup>

That lake of fire and brimstone, ever burning but never consumed, is the description in the scriptures for hell.<sup>11</sup>

### The Atonement offers relief and peace

Suppose there was no cure, no way to ease spiritual pain or to erase the agony of guilt. Suppose each mistake, each sin was added to the others with the racking, the harrowing up, the torment going on forever. Too many of us needlessly carry burdens of guilt and shame.

The scriptures teach that there "must needs be . . . opposition in all things." If not, "righteousness could not be brought to pass,"<sup>12</sup> neither happiness, nor joy, neither redemption.

The third article of faith teaches, "We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel." The Atonement offers redemption from spiritual death and from suffering caused by sin.

For some reason we think the Atonement of Christ applies *only* at the end of mortal life to redemption from the Fall, from spiritual death. It is much more than that. It is an ever-present power to call upon in everyday life. When we are racked or harrowed up or tormented by guilt or burdened with grief, He can heal us. While we do not fully understand how the Atonement of Christ was made, we can experience "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding."<sup>13</sup>

The gospel plan is the "great plan of happiness."<sup>14</sup> It is contrary to the nature of God and contrary to the very nature of man to find happiness in sin. "Wickedness never was happiness."<sup>15</sup>

We know that some anxiety and depression is caused by physical disorders, but much (perhaps most) of it is not pain of the body but of the spirit. Spiritual pain resulting from guilt can be replaced with peace of mind.

### The healing power of the Atonement

In contrast to the hard words condemning sin, listen to the calming, heal-

ing words of *mercy*, which balance the harsher words of *justice*. Alma said:

"My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; but . . . my soul is pained no more."<sup>16</sup>

"I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell. . . .

"And . . . 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!"<sup>17</sup>

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

The Lord said, "Behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent."<sup>18</sup>

If Christ had not made His Atonement, the penalties for mistakes would be added one on the other. Life would be hopeless. But He willingly sacrificed in order that we may be redeemed. And He said, "Behold, he who has repented of his

sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.”<sup>19</sup>

Ezekiel said: “If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him.”<sup>20</sup>

Think of that—not even mentioned!

We can even “retain a remission of [our] sins.”<sup>21</sup> Baptism by immersion is for the remission of our sins. That covenant can be renewed by partaking of the sacrament each week.<sup>22</sup>

### Apply the Atonement in everyday life

The Atonement has practical, personal, everyday value; apply it in your life. It can be activated with so simple a beginning as prayer. You will not thereafter be free from trouble and mistakes but can erase the guilt through repentance and be at peace.

I quoted the third article of faith. It has two parts: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved.” Then the conditions: “by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”

Justice requires that there be a punishment.<sup>23</sup> Guilt is not erased without pain. There are laws to obey and ordinances to receive, and there are penalties to pay.

Physical pain requires treatment and a change in lifestyle.

So it is with spiritual pain. There must be repentance and discipline, most of which is self-discipline. But to restore our innocence after serious transgressions, there must be confession to our bishop, who is the appointed judge.

The Lord promised, “A new heart . . . will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.”<sup>24</sup> That spiritual heart surgery, like in the body, may cause you pain and require a change in habits and conduct.

But in both cases, recovery brings renewed life and peace of mind.

### The ever-present power of the Atonement

When the heavens were opened and the Father and the Son stood before Joseph Smith, the Father spoke seven words: “*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*”<sup>25</sup> Revelation followed revelation, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints<sup>26</sup> was organized. The Savior Himself declared it to be “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth.”<sup>27</sup>

Peter, James, and John restored the higher priesthood, and John the Baptist the Aaronic Priesthood. The fulness of the gospel was revealed.

Following the revelations which came and yet come to His Church, all that has been printed or preached or sung or built or taught or broadcast has been to the end that men and women and children can know the redeeming influence of the Atonement of Christ in their everyday lives and be at peace.

He said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.”<sup>28</sup>

As one who stands among His Apostles, I testify of Him and of the ever-present power of His Atonement.

### The touch of the Master's hand

From the lofty words of *justice* and *mercy* and of *warning* and *hope* in the verses of scripture, I turn to the very same message in verses of a simple poem:

’Twas battered and scarred, and the  
 auctioneer  
 Thought it scarcely worth his while  
 To waste much time on the old violin,  
 But held it up with a smile:  
 “What am I bidden, good folks,”  
 he cried,  
 “Who’ll start the bidding for me?”  
 “A dollar, a dollar”; then, “Two!”  
 “Only two?”

Two dollars, and who'll make it three?  
 Three dollars, once; three dollars,  
 twice;  
 Going for three—" But no,  
 From the room, far back, a gray-  
 haired man  
 Came forward and picked up the bow;  
 Then, wiping the dust from the old  
 violin,  
 And tightening the loose strings,  
 He played a melody pure and sweet  
 As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,  
 With a voice that was quiet and low,  
 Said, "What am I bid for the old  
 violin?"  
 And he held it up with the bow.  
 "A thousand dollars, and who'll make  
 it two?"  
 Two thousand! And who'll make it  
 three?  
 Three thousand, once, three thousand,  
 twice,  
 And going, and gone!" said he.  
 The people cheered, but some of them  
 cried,  
 "We do not quite understand  
 What changed its worth." Swift came  
 the reply:  
 "The touch of a master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune,  
 And battered and scarred with sin,  
 Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless  
 crowd,  
 Much like the old violin.  
 A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine,  
 A game—and he travels on.  
 He's "going" once, and "going" twice,  
 He's "going" and almost "gone."  
 But the Master comes, and the foolish  
 crowd  
 Never can quite understand  
 The worth of a soul and the change  
 that's wrought  
 By the touch of the Master's hand.<sup>29</sup>

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

## NOTES

1. Doctrine and Covenants 42:11.
2. 1 John 1:8.
3. 1 John 1:10.
4. Alma 36:12; italics added.
5. See Mosiah 27:29; Alma 36:12, 16–17; Mormon 9:3.
6. See 2 Nephi 9:47; Alma 14:6; 15:3; 36:12, 17, 19; 39:7.
7. See Mosiah 2:39; 3:25; 5:5; Moroni 8:21.
8. See Alma 41:11; Acts 8:23; Mosiah 27:29; Alma 36:18; Mormon 8:31; Moroni 8:14.
9. Mosiah 3:25.
10. *Deseret News*, 8 July 1857, 138; see also *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 357.
11. See Revelation 20:10; 21:8; 2 Nephi 9:16, 19, 26; 28:23; Jacob 3:11; 6:10; Mosiah 3:27; Alma 12:17; 14:14; Doctrine and Covenants 63:17; 76:36.
12. 2 Nephi 2:11.
13. Philippians 4:7.
14. Alma 42:8.
15. Alma 41:10; see also verse 11.
16. Mosiah 27:29.
17. Alma 36:13, 17–20.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 19:16.
19. Doctrine and Covenants 58:42; see also Hebrews 8:12; 10:17.
20. Ezekiel 33:15–16.
21. Mosiah 4:12; see also 2 Nephi 25:26; 31:17; Mosiah 3:13; 4:11; 15:11; Alma 4:14; 7:6; 12:34; 13:16; Helaman 14:13; 3 Nephi 12:2; 30:2; Moroni 8:25; 10:33.
22. See Doctrine and Covenants 27:2.
23. See Alma 42:16–22.
24. Ezekiel 36:26.
25. Joseph Smith—History 1:17.
26. See Doctrine and Covenants 115:4.
27. Doctrine and Covenants 1:30.
28. John 14:27.
29. Myra Brooks Welch, "The Touch of the Master's Hand," *The Gospel Messenger*, Brethren Press, 26 Feb. 1921; see also *Best-Loved Poems of the LDS People*, comp. Jack Lyon, et al. [1996], 182–83.