

The Love of God

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Our Father and our Redeemer have blessed us with commandments, and in obeying Their commandments, we feel Their perfect love more fully and more profoundly.

Our Heavenly Father loves us profoundly and perfectly.¹ In His love, He created a plan, a plan of redemption and happiness to open to us all the opportunities and joys we are willing to receive, up to and including all that He has and is.² To achieve this, He was even willing to offer His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, as our Redeemer. “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.”³ His is a Father’s pure love—universal to all yet personal to each.

Jesus Christ shares with the Father this same perfect love. When the Father first elaborated His great plan of happiness, He called for one to act as a Savior to redeem us—an essential part of that plan. Jesus volunteered, “Here am I, send me.”⁴ The Savior “doeth not anything save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation.”⁵

This divine love should give us abundant comfort and confidence as we pray to the Father in the name of Christ. Not one of us is a stranger to Them. We need not hesitate to call upon God, even when we feel unworthy. We can rely on the mercy and merits of Jesus Christ to be heard.⁶ As we abide in God’s love, we depend less and less on the approval of others to guide us.

The Love of God Does Not Excuse Sin; Rather, It Offers Redemption

Because God’s love is all-embracing, some speak of it as “unconditional,” and in their minds they may project that thought to mean that God’s *blessings* are “unconditional” and that *salvation* is “unconditional.” They are not. Some are wont to say, “The Savior loves me just as I am,” and that is certainly true. But He cannot take any of us into His kingdom just as we are, “for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence.”⁷ Our sins must first be resolved.

Professor Hugh Nibley once noted that the kingdom of God cannot endure if it indulges even the smallest sin: “The slightest taint of corruption means that the

other world would be neither incorruptible nor eternal. The tiniest flaw in a building, institution, code, or character will inevitably prove fatal in the long run of eternity.”⁸ The commandments of God are “strict”⁹ because His kingdom and its citizens can stand only if they consistently reject evil and choose good, without exception.¹⁰

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland observed, “Jesus clearly understood what many in our modern culture seem to forget: that there is a crucial difference between the commandment to forgive sin (which He had an infinite capacity to do) and the warning against condoning it (which He never ever did even once).”¹¹

Despite our present imperfections, however, we can still hope to attain “a name and standing,”¹² a place, in His Church and in the celestial world. After making it clear that He cannot excuse or wink at sin, the Lord assures us:

“Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven.”¹³

“And as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me.”¹⁴

Repentance and divine grace resolve the dilemma:

“Remember also the words which Amulek spake unto Zeezrom, in the city of Ammonihah; for he said unto him that the Lord surely should come to redeem his people, but that he should not come to redeem them *in* their sins, but to redeem them *from* their sins.

“And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them from their sins because of repentance; therefore he hath sent his angels to declare the tidings of the conditions of repentance, which bringeth unto the power of the Redeemer, unto the salvation of their souls.”¹⁵

With the condition of repentance, the Lord can extend mercy without robbing justice, and “God ceaseth not to be God.”¹⁶

The way of the world, as you know, is anti-Christ, or “anything but Christ.” Our day is a replay of Book of Mormon history in which charismatic figures pursue unrighteous dominion over others, celebrate sexual license, and promote accumulating wealth as the object of our existence. Their philosophies “justify in committing a little sin”¹⁷ or even a lot of sin, but none can offer redemption. That comes only through the blood of the Lamb. The best the “anything but Christ” or “anything but repentance” crowd can offer is the unfounded claim that sin does not exist or that if it exists, it ultimately has no consequences. I can’t see that argument getting much traction at the Final Judgment.¹⁸

We don’t have to attempt the impossible in trying to rationalize our sins away. And on the other hand, we don’t have to attempt the impossible in erasing the effects of sin by our own merit alone. Ours is not a religion of rationalization nor a religion of perfectionism but a religion of redemption—redemption through Jesus Christ. If

we are among the penitent, with His Atonement our sins are nailed to His cross, and “with his stripes we are healed.”¹⁹

The Yearning Love of the Prophets Mirrors the Love of God

I have long been impressed by, and have also felt, the yearning love of the prophets of God in their warnings against sin. They are not motivated by a desire to condemn. Their true desire mirrors the love of God; in fact, it *is* the love of God. They love those to whom they are sent, whoever they may be and whatever they may be like. Just as the Lord, His servants do not want anyone to suffer the pains of sin and poor choices.²⁰

Alma was sent to declare the message of repentance and redemption to a hate-filled people who were willing to persecute, torture, and even kill Christian believers, including Alma himself. Yet he loved them and yearned for their salvation. After declaring the Atonement of Christ to the people of Ammonihah, Alma pleaded: “And now, my brethren, *I wish from the inmost part of my heart, yea, with great anxiety even unto pain*, that ye would hearken unto my words, and cast off your sins, ... that ye may be lifted up at the last day and enter into [God’s] rest.”²¹

In President Russell M. Nelson’s words, “It is precisely because we do care deeply about all of God’s children that we proclaim His truth.”²²

God Loves You; Do You Love Him?

The love of the Father and the Son is freely given but also includes hopes and expectations. Again, quoting President Nelson, “God’s laws are motivated entirely by His infinite love for us and His desire for us to become all we can become.”²³

Because They love you, They do not want to leave you “just as you are.” Because They love you, They want you to have joy and success. Because They love you, They want you to repent because that is the path to happiness. But it is your choice—They honor your agency. You must choose to love Them, to serve Them, to keep Their commandments. Then They can more abundantly *ble*ss you as well as *love* you.

Their principal expectation of us is that we also love. “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”²⁴ As John wrote, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”²⁵

Former Primary General President Joy D. Jones recalled that as a young couple, she and her husband were called to visit and minister to a family who hadn’t been to church for many years. It was immediately clear in their first visit that they were not wanted. After the frustration of additional failed attempts, and after much sincere prayer and pondering, Brother and Sister Jones received an answer to the *why* of their service in this verse from the Doctrine and Covenants: “Thou shalt love

the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy might, mind, and strength; and in the name of Jesus Christ *thou shalt serve him*.”²⁶ Sister Jones said:

“We realized that we were sincerely striving to serve this family and to serve our bishop, but we had to ask ourselves if we were really serving out of love for the Lord. ...

“... We began looking forward to our visits with this dear family because of our love for the Lord [see 1 Nephi 11:22]. We were doing it for Him. He made the struggle no longer a struggle. After many months of our standing on the doorstep, the family began letting us in. Eventually, we had regular prayer and tender gospel discussions together. A long-lasting friendship developed. We were worshipping and loving Him by loving His children.”²⁷

In acknowledging that God loves us perfectly, we each might ask, “How well do I love God? Can He rely on my love as I rely on His?” Would it not be a worthy aspiration to live so that God can love us not just *in spite of* our failings but also *because of* what we are becoming? Oh, that He could say of you and me as He said of Hyrum Smith, for example, “I, the Lord, love him because of the integrity of his heart.”²⁸ Let us remember John’s kind admonition: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”²⁹

Indeed, His commandments are not grievous—just the opposite. They mark the path of healing, happiness, peace, and joy. Our Father and our Redeemer have blessed us with commandments, and in obeying Their commandments, we feel Their perfect love more fully and more profoundly.³⁰

Here is the solution for our incessantly quarrelsome times—the love of God. In the golden age of Book of Mormon history following the Savior’s ministry, it is reported that “there was *no contention* in the land, *because of the love of God* which did dwell in the hearts of the people.”³¹ As we strive toward Zion, remember the promise in Revelation: “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the [holy] city.”³²

I bear witness of the reality of our Heavenly Father and our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and of Their constant, undying love. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 1. In preparing this message, I have drawn upon principles taught by President Russell M. Nelson in “The Love and Laws of God” (Brigham Young University devotional, Sept. 17, 2019), speeches.byu.edu, and by President Dallin H. Oaks in “Love and Law,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2009, 26–29.
2. 2. See Moses 1:39.
3. 3. John 3:16.
4. 4. Abraham 3:27.

5. 5. 2 Nephi 26:24. As Jesus Himself said: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:13–14).
6. 6. See 2 Nephi 2:8; Moroni 6:4.
7. 7. Moses 6:57.
8. 8. *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present*, vol. 12 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (1992), 61; see also *Approaching Zion*, vol. 9 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (1989), 274: “It [an everlasting Zion] can no more carry on forever laden with defects and imperfections than a bridge or tower can stand forever weakened by even minor flaws in construction.”
9. 9. Alma 37:13.
10. 10. Thus, the Savior declares: “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life” (Matthew 7:14) and “I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:31; see also Alma 45:16).
11. 11. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Cost—and Blessings—of Discipleship,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2014, 8; see also Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Second Half of the Second Century of Brigham Young University” (university conference address, Aug. 23, 2021), 4, speeches.byu.edu: “As near as I can tell, Christ never *once* withheld His love from anyone, but He also never once said to anyone, ‘Because I love you, you are exempt from keeping my commandments.’”
12. 12. Doctrine and Covenants 109:24.
13. 13. Doctrine and Covenants 1:32.
14. 14. Mosiah 26:30.
15. 15. Helaman 5:10–11; emphasis added.
16. 16. Alma 42:23; see also verses 13–15, 22, 24–25.
17. 17. 2 Nephi 28:8.
18. 18. See 2 Nephi 9:46.
19. 19. Isaiah 53:5; see also Mosiah 14:5.
20. 20. See Mosiah 28:3.
21. 21. Alma 13:27, 29; emphasis added.
22. 22. Russell M. Nelson, “The Love and Laws of God,” 3.
23. 23. Russell M. Nelson, “The Love and Laws of God,” 3.

24. 24. 1 John 4:8.
25. 25. 1 John 4:11.
26. 26. Doctrine and Covenants 59:5; emphasis added.
27. 27. Joy D. Jones, "For Him," *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2018, 50.
28. 28. Doctrine and Covenants 124:15.
29. 29. 1 John 5:3; see also John 14:15; 2 John 1:6.
30. 30. See John 15:10.
31. 31. 4 Nephi 1:15; emphasis added.
32. 32. Revelation 22:14.