

To Whom Much is Given

By Sue Manning

And I, the Lord God, formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul; the first flesh upon the earth, the first man also; And I, the Lord God, planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there I put the man whom I had formed... And I, the Lord God, planted the tree of life also, in the midst of the garden; and also the tree of knowledge of good and evil...And I, the Lord God, commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; Nevertheless, thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee; but remember that I forbid it; For in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Genesis 2:8-12, 19-22 IV) [Genesis 2:7-9, 16-17 KJV]

In the first recorded conversation between God and Adam, God states the law, allows Adam to choose to obey or not and defines the result of disobedience. We all know the story and the choice of Adam. Our lives were framed by that decision.

God established the laws, both spiritual and natural. He gave man agency to choose whether to obey or not. He also instituted justice, the administering of deserved punishment or reward, depending on what is chosen. The plan is quite simple. Once our decisions are factored in, however, the plan can get unpleasant and gloomy, at least until mercy is introduced.

Inertia is one of the natural laws God created. The law of inertia basically says an object in motion tends to stay in motion. If a truck driver, pulling a trailer with a large boulder, wants to get his load to his destination safely, he must consider this natural law. If he stops abruptly without the boulder securely fastened, the truck will stop, but the boulder will continue in motion and smash against the cab of the truck. To ignore or disobey God's natural laws can result in bad consequences. The consequences of disobeying God's spiritual laws are not always so quickly evident, but justice is there, and we will face it sooner or later.

Nephi says,

And I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; Wherefore he became a devil, having sought that which was evil before God. And because he had fallen from heaven, and had become miserable for ever, he sought also the misery of all mankind. Wherefore, he said, unto Eve, yea, even that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies; wherefore he said, Partake of the forbidden fruit, and ye shall not die, but ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil. And after Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit, they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the earth. And now behold, if Adam had not transgressed, he would not have fallen; but he would have

remained in the garden of Eden. (2 Nephi 1:101-105, 111 RLDS) [2 Nephi 2:17-19 LDS]

[2 Nephi

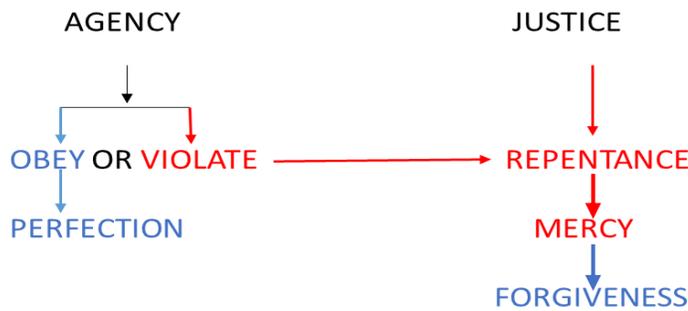


Unfortunately, we all choose to disobey. It is our carnal nature. We are not perfect, so the path to perfection is not as easily traveled as the blue path in the flow chart. That would put us in the red path, which leads to punishment. Alma said, “Now we see that Adam did fall by the partaking of the forbidden fruit, according to the word of God; and thus we see, that by his fall, **all mankind became a lost and a fallen people.**” (Alma 9:38 RLDS) [Alma 12:22 LDS] and that we...“are hardened; yea, all are fallen, and are lost, and must perish except it be through the atonement which it is expedient should be made” (Alma 16:209 RLDS) [Alma 34:9 LDS]. (Emphasis added)

The law cannot save us from punishment. Mosiah said “that salvation doth not come by **the law alone**; and were it not for the atonement which **God himself shall make** for the sins and iniquities of his people, that they must unavoidably perish...” (Mosiah 8:5 RLDS) [Mosiah 13:28 LDS] (Emphasis added)

But God is a God of mercy. Since He established the law and justice, only He can satisfy the demands of justice. No one or nothing can satisfy those demands but God, Himself. The same goes for any loving parent. If we tell our child he cannot have a cookie, no one else can allow him to have a cookie without noncompliance. Only the parent who made the rule can have mercy and allow the child a cookie without disobedience coming into play.

For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice: but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice. Now there is not any man that can sacrifice his own blood, which will atone for the sins of another. (Alma 16:210-211 RLDS) [Alma 34:10-11 LDS]



With mercy included, our flow chart looks differently. We are given an opportunity to repent, God has mercy, and we are forgiven.

However, the repentance process can seem a little mysterious, not easily understood and can be given little thought. In our prayers, it is so easy to mumble, “Forgive me of my sins” and be on with our list of “wants.” Is that really what repentance is? Asking for a blanket of forgiveness and not addressing each and every thing we have done in disobedience seems thoughtless, if not insincere. How can we list every iniquity we have committed, though? What does God expect of us in our repentance?

Christians often talk of being in the gray area—not perfect but not too wicked. The gray area makes us feel like we are not that bad and will just be “beaten with a few stripes.” It is a device of Satan to make us feel comfortable. We certainly don’t want to see ourselves in the black, darkness of sin, capable of abominations. All sin, no matter how insignificant we perceive it, removes us from the presence of God. Alma 21:18 (RLDS) [Alma 45:16 LDS] says “the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance.”

Nephi puts it very clearly:

And there shall also be many which shall say, Eat, drink, and be merry; nevertheless, fear God, he will justify in committing a little sin: yea, lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this. And do all these things, for to-morrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God. Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false, and vain, and foolish doctrines. (2 Nephi 12:10-12 RLDS) [2 Nephi 28:8-9 LDS]

Fooling ourselves into thinking we are not “that bad” and that living in the gray area is still a safe place to be, is Satan’s way of keeping us unprepared for Jesus’ coming; putting us in the group of the five foolish virgins. We cannot afford to dupe ourselves anymore and fall for

vain and foolish doctrines. The world is changing quickly, and tribulation is upon our country; we must be prepared. All of the pork and beans Walmart can supply will be of no use to us if we are not prepared spiritually, and that includes repenting and being spotless before God.

Two Kinds of Sinners

Saul of Tarsus, son of a Pharisee, was a devout Jew. He was raised and taught by those who knew the law. He was also feared by the early Christians. He condoned the stoning of Stephen by holding the coats of those who actively participated. He rounded up the believers, both men and women, and threw them in jail. Saul tells King Agrippa in Acts 26, that he did many things contrary to the name of Jesus; imprisoning the Saints and testifying against them when they were put to death.

His conversion experience is told in Acts 9 and 26. While Saul and his associates were on their way to Damascus with authority to punish the Christians, God showed him mercy. At midday, a light appeared and Saul heard Jesus ask him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" (Acts 22:7 IV/KJV) They all fell to the earth in fear, but Saul was told to arise. When he stood and opened his eyes, he could not see. His colleagues, who saw the light but heard not the voice, took him to Damascus to the home of a friend. After three days of blindness, Ananias, being led by the Lord, came and administered to Saul, and his sight was restored. Saul was immediately baptized and went to spread the Good News. Saul was a powerful instrument in the hands of God for the rest of his days.

A similar story is told in the Book of Mormon. The father of Alma the Younger was a high priest in the church of God. Alma the Younger was taught by his father and was raised a Christian. We know this because in Alma 17:10 (RLDS) [Alma 36:13 LDS], he tells his son Helaman, that he had rebelled against God and had not kept His commandments. He grew up to be a wicked man. He led many people away from the church and caused them to do iniquity. He instigated much dissension in the church.

His conversion story is told in Mosiah 11 (RLDS) [Mosiah 27 LDS] and Alma 17 (RLDS) [Alma 36 LDS]. As Alma and the sons of King Mosiah were rebelling against God, an angel appeared to them. They all fell to the earth in fear. The angel said, "Alma, arise, and stand forth, for why persecutest thou the church of God?" Alma was so astonished he could not speak nor move his limbs for three days. The sons of Mosiah had to carry him to his father's home. The priests fasted and prayed and Alma's strength and voice were restored. Alma was a powerful servant of the Lord the rest of his days.

The lives of these two men, Saul and Alma, appear to run parallel, but there is a major difference not recognized at first glance. Saul was taken to Damascus, healed through Ananias and then was baptized. Saul never mentions any anguish he suffered during his three days of blindness, but Alma tells his son in Alma 17:10, 11 (RLDS) [Alma 36:12-13 LDS], "I was racked with eternal torment, for my soul was harrowed up to the greatest degree, and racked with all my sins. Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; Yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments..."

Both Saul and Alma had been taught the law as children, but Alma had also been taught of the greater light, Jesus. He had been given more insight and understood the mercy and grace through Jesus Christ. Therefore, Alma had sinned against the greater light. Saul was a sinner through ignorance of the greater law. Alma knew the greater law, but sinned out of rebellion toward God.

Justice demands a greater repentance process from those who are openly rebellious against God than from those who sin in ignorance. We often hear “to whom much is given, much is required,” referring to our service to the Lord, but Jesus is talking about the wise servant and what is required of him, and his severe punishment because he has sinned against the greater light.

And that servant who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not for his Lord's coming, **neither did according to his will**, shall be beaten with **many stripes**. But he that knew not his Lord's will, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few. **For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required;** (Luke 12:56-57 IV/KJV) (emphasis added)

Beware from henceforth and refrain from sin lest sore judgments fall upon your heads; **for unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation.** (Section 81:1c RLDS) [Section 82:2 LDS] (emphasis added)

It makes sense that Alma’s conversion experience would include a period of repentance that would be much more intense than that of Saul. He didn’t mumble, “forgive me of my sins,” and move on. He suffered more physically, both the loss of his limbs and his voice, but he especially suffered more spiritually, by remembering all of his sins and iniquities and rebellion. (Alma 17:10-11 RLDS) [Alma 36:12-13 LDS] He waded through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death (Mosiah 11:190 RLDS) [Mosiah 27:28 LDS].

Have we repented nigh unto death? Have we realized all of the sins and iniquities we have committed against God?

The only way Alma could repent of all he had done was through God revealing it to him. We must come to the Lord and ask him to show us our sins so we may begin our repentance and be clean when it is time to meet the Bridegroom. Dependence on our own self-evaluation will leave us far short of the mark that God has laid before us. We must truly feel remorse and mourn over the iniquities in our life and spend time developing our repentance to the degree that we can be forgiven of sinning against the greater light.

Jew, son of Pharisee,
was taught his religion as a child

Christian, son of high priest,
was taught his religion as a child

Persecuted the church, participated in stoning of Stephen, jailed Christians	Persecuted the church, wicked and idolatrous, led people to iniquity
Light appeared to Paul, friends there to witness	Angel appeared to Alma, friends there to witness
Jesus asked, "Saul, Saul, why persecuteth thou me?" Acts 9:4	Angel asked, "Alma, why persecuteth thou the church?" Mosiah 11:165
3 days blind	3 days dumb and paralyzed
Paul was taken to Damascus, healed by Ananias, baptized	Remembered all of his sins and was racked with eternal torment to greatest degree continuously for three days, the thought of standing before God brought him inexplicable horror
Became life-long servant of the Lord	Became life-long servant of the Lord

But just as Alma remembered his father prophesying of Jesus coming to atone for the sins of the world, we can say, "O Jesus, Thou Son of God, have mercy on me who art in the gall of bitterness and art encircled about by the everlasting chains of death!" (Alma 17:22 RLDS) [Alma 36:14 LDS]

Alma truly saw what justice required and, if he didn't meet those requirements, he knew what his punishment would be. But then, grace was granted by our savior, Jesus Christ, and Alma experienced the exquisite and sweet joy of forgiveness. Alma said he will praise Him forever, because he then saw what the cross meant and was so appreciative of God's mercy for him.

When justice demands payment, mercy can fulfill that demand. In Luke 7 (IV/KJV), Jesus tells a parable about a creditor forgiving the debts of two individuals, one who owed a little and one who owed much more. He asked who will love the one who forgave the debt more. The answer is, of course, the one who was forgiven of the greater debt. Repentance may not be an easy or enjoyable process, but it will be a journey that will help us love our Savior more, have a deeper understanding of the cross and fully appreciate what He has done for us. Repentance is not just the vehicle to receive forgiveness, but also a way to grow closer to our Lord.

It is time for us to come to the Lord and ask Him to show us our sins, that we may begin our repentance journey. He will take us on this passage to forgiveness as He sees fit. Each redeemed sinner will have a different story, molded for him by our Savior. Each will also come out with greater understanding of grace and mercy and the preciousness of that gift.

At the end of Alma's three days of torment and "inexpressible horror," he remembered his father teaching about the atonement of Jesus. In his heart, he asked Jesus to have mercy on him. He told Helaman, "And now behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed by the memory of my sins no more." (Alma 17:17 RLDS) [Alma 36:19 LDS]

Once Alma received forgiveness, he was not tormented by those memories anymore. He

didn't completely forget them, but the torment and mourning was gone. He was able to draw on his past life to help teach others. God forgets those sins. Isaiah 43:25 (IV/KJV), Jeremiah 31:34 (IV/KJV) and Hebrews 8:12 (IV/KJV) say that once God forgives us, He remembers our iniquities no more. Once we are forgiven, we will still remember, but we should not pick up the burden of that sin and allow shame to continue to pull us down. Not letting go and continuing to bear that burden is rejecting the forgiveness and reminding God of our iniquity. We are no better off than before. Part of our repenting process is to let go of the mourning and learn to delight in the forgiveness.

As Christians and, even more so, believers in the fullness of the gospel, we must prepare now for our Savior's return. Start the repentance process now by asking God to reveal those things in your life that separate you from Him. Pray for direction and understanding in your repentance journey. Once mercy is granted and justice is satisfied, praise God for what He has done for you and leave that burden behind. No one says it better than Nephi:

O, my beloved brethren, turn away from your sins; shake off the chains of him that would bind you fast; Come unto that God who is the rock of your salvation. Prepare your souls for that glorious day, when justice shall be administered unto the righteous; even the day of judgment, that ye may not shrink with awful fear; That ye may not remember your awful guilt in perfectness, and be constrained to exclaim, Holy, holy are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty ...Come, my brethren, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which can not satisfy. Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, (2 Nephi 6:89-92, 99-101 RLDS) [2 Nephi 9:45-46, 50-51 LDS]

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