

# Ecclesiastical Implications of Grace

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WHILE LIVING IN PHILADELPHIA several years ago, I served for three years as liaison from the Philadelphia Stake High Council to the Philadelphia Spanish Branch located in the Puerto Rican and black barrios of North Philadelphia. The Church members I visited there live in the highest crime rate area of Philadelphia, where mugging and murder are a way of life and where alcohol, sex, and drugs seem the only way to stop the pain and suffering of barrio life.

As difficult, dangerous, and depressing as barrio life was for our branch members, their greatest pain came from the social, economic, cultural, and even geographical alienation from their sisters and brothers in the stake. Their alienation was difficult to accept because the gospel of Christ holds out so much promise of fellowship, compassion, understanding, comfort, and help. But each week that they received no help, that stake visitors avoided them, their alienation deepened. Their poverty was confirmed every time they came to the extravagantly decorated, catered parties and dances held in the four other ward buildings located in the safe, tree-lined suburbs of western Philadelphia.

Of course, one does not have to live in an inner-city barrio to experience humiliation, shame, anger, and pain. One does not have to be poor or socially oppressed to need comfort, encouragement, understanding, and love. We have all been injured, we are all stranded, as essayist Donlu Thayer reminds us in her 1989 "Unrighteous Dominion: We Want Some Too." We all labor under the burden of sin, the disappointment of unrealized dreams and unrealistic expectations.

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Almost all of us, to one extent or another, have been hurt by the "poisonous pedagogy" of emotional and physical abuse. Some have even been sexually abused (Bradshaw 1988, 1-16; see also Miller 1984a, 1984b, 1984c).

Latter-day Saints, trained and conditioned to look at the positive, continue to share the great myth that "all is well." We think we are somehow immune to such abuse, but we are not. Abuse and neglect are not unknown to us. Sexual abuse in a Mormon home seems too horrible to think about. But I'm forced to acknowledge its reality every time I see one of my friends whose father, a bishop, molested her up until the night before her temple wedding.

Many of us will carry emotional scars for the rest of our lives. Even those Church members living in relative ease and comfort sometimes find life confusing, difficult, and almost too much to bear. Some, who find it *is* too much to bear, take their own lives just to stop the pain. Even if our own lives have not been touched by this kind of intense pain, surely we all suffer because of personal sin, we all need comfort, and we all need to be healed.

Jesus Christ asks us to come unto him and lay these burdens at his feet. He is our Savior and Redeemer. Through his grace he will bear it all. When we allow his arms of love and grace to be wrapped around us, we are loved, comforted, and healed. But while his grace is sufficient for us all, too often in the Church, our grace is not sufficient for each other. Many of us who have been raised in the gospel of works find ourselves racing so intently toward the celestial kingdom (see Thayer 1989b) that we are sometimes blinded to the pain and suffering of others. Because we are so interested in self-exaltation and in seeking approval through our own works, we often fail to recognize opportunities for service beyond ourselves. In our misunderstanding of salvation, many of us spend our lives trying to earn eternal life through personal, self-centered works and obedience to ecclesiastical rules and regulations.

I believe that we as Church members need to pause in our rush to the celestial kingdom and ask what our emphasis on works has wrought, not only in the way we think of Christ and his atonement, but in the way we think about priesthood, Church leadership, and, most important, in the way we treat each other. It is true that the gospel of works has produced good, dedicated, hard-working people and has done much worthy of our praise and respect. But a gospel of works tends also to promote self-righteousness, pride, arrogance among those who believe they are doing all the right stuff, and despair among those who believe they are failing (see Toscano 1990, 116-29). Ultimately a gospel of works displaces Christ's works and replaces them with our own, thus rejecting Christ's gift of atonement to us.

I believe that we, as a Church and as a people, must reject our belief in a gospel of works and focus on understanding and living a gospel of grace. The ecclesiastical implications of the gospel of grace will help us understand how to make the Church more of a safe harbor, a place of comfort, of love, and of peace. We, as members of the Church, need to understand the difference between works that we think earn us exaltation and the works of Christ. Where the traditional gospel of works is self-centered, self-saving, and self-promoting, the works of Christ are self-less, motivated by love. They focus our attention away from ourselves and into the lives of others. They teach us through service to each other to be loving and gracious. As we grow grace for grace, we learn increased compassion.

As I examine the ecclesiastical implications of Christ's grace, I hope to reinforce the notion, which has been convincingly advanced in other places, that the doctrine of salvation and exaltation by grace is fundamental and central to the teachings of Mormonism (see Bennion 1966; Olsen 1984; Toscano and Toscano 1990; Voros 1986, 1987). I also hope to advance the notion that to believe in the grace of Christ is to correctly understand the doctrine of salvation and of his atonement as a gift that is freely given to us out of love rather than something we earn.

I understand that we have been taught most, if not all, of our Church lives that we are exalted by how hard we work, by what we do. I tried in vain for two years in my Book of Mormon Gospel Doctrine class to discuss the notion of grace without someone reminding the class that "faith without works is dead" or that "we are saved by grace, but only after all we can do" (2 Ne. 25:23). Invariably someone would try to direct the class into a lengthy discussion of such Church works as tuna canning or temple work. It was difficult, if not impossible, to engage them in a class discussion that questioned their belief in the value of personal works or impugned their own social, professional, or spiritual achievements. Our most difficult discussions focused on the teachings of King Benjamin, the notions of pride and costly apparel found throughout the Book of Mormon, and the sobering discussion in chapter 8 of Mormon, as well as Moroni's farewell injunction in the final verses of Moroni, chapter 10. During one particularly difficult lesson on "costly apparel," at least half a dozen class members got up and walked out of the class. Two others came to me privately after class to assure me that their fake Rolex watches cost no more than a good Casio.

In our meetings we sing, "Let us all press on in the work of the Lord, That when life is o'er we may gain a reward." We are prisoners of the Puritan work ethic. We work hard for both material goods and

for our eternal exaltation and believe that those things either belong to us now or will someday be ours because we have earned them. Our understanding of the traditional work ethic has given many Latter-day Saints a sense of accomplishment and is a source of pride and recognition. It's what made America great, it's the American way, and all too sadly I have come to believe that, in general, it's the Mormon way.

Bruce R. McConkie has told us that "work is the law of life; it is the ruling principle in the lives of the Saints. We cannot, while physically able, voluntarily shift the burden of our own support to others. Doles abound in evils. Industry, thrift, and self-respect are essential to salvation" (1979, 132). Somehow we make the quantum leap from American work ethic to salvation and exaltation by works. I still remember hearing a high priest group leader in my Philadelphia ward remark in quorum meeting one Sunday that "I'm working in God's business. He's my boss, and exaltation is my paycheck."

Some Church members seek personal righteousness by "getting" a certain number of temple endowments each year. We pay tithing against the possibility of future lean times, expecting that God will step in and bail us out with funds already deposited into that great savings and loan in the sky. We begin early in our children's lives to reward them for their Church activity and service with certificates, awards, recognition in sacrament or stake meetings, and praise from bishops or stake presidents. Because they are recognized and rewarded for their Church service as youth, they come to expect advancements in quorum, class, ward, and stake organizations as payment for progress and reward for righteousness.

Many in the Church, as Elder Dallin Oaks has pointed out, serve out of hope for earthly rewards, prominence, or recognition by the ward or stake. Others, he observes, are searching for companionship or possible business connections. Still others, Oaks says, serve out of fear, a sense of duty, or loyalty to friends, family, or traditions. These, he says, "are those . . . good soldiers, who instinctively do what they are asked without question and sometimes without giving much thought to the reasons for their service" (Oaks 1984, 14). As I listened to this talk, the thought struck me that good soldiers are given medals and certificates of commendation to recognize their bravery and service. These tokens are a source of great personal pride, the same kind of pride that we are warned against in the Book of Mormon, as well as in one of President Ezra Taft Benson's recent conference addresses. "Pride is the universal sin, the great vice," he said, "the great stumbling block to Zion" (1989, 6-7). Many of us receive our personal pride, our self-esteem, and our sense of worthiness and validation as good members of the Church from recognition received from our Church service.

We tithe, obey the Word of Wisdom, make our once-at-the-end-of-the-month home-teaching visit, do two or three temple endowments each month, pay our monthly fast offering, can tuna twice a year, hold family home evenings, send our daughters and sons on missions, attend our Church meetings, and give our all to Church assignments.

We attend tithing settlement, where we count our money, and then we attend our yearly temple recommend interviews where we count our blessings and spiritual successes and are validated as worthy members of the Church. It is the gospel of works that assures us that we are doing what is required. It is the gospel of works that tells us we have done sufficient for our needs, and then we convince ourselves that we are worthy.

But it is Christ who reminds us that after we think we have done enough and are worthy; after we come to him and pledge our discipleship, our loyalty, and our love; after we have done all this, we must sell all we have, give it to the poor, and follow him. But many of us, like the rich young man in Mark 10:17–22, would be unwilling to sell our material goods, our costly apparel, our expensive cars, our warm and comfortable houses; many of us are unable to give up our positions of power, our titles, our honors and recognition from the world or the Church. And who can blame us? We believe we have earned it all. We have lived the gospel of works perfectly, and look how we have succeeded!

And our success has not gone unnoticed. We have let our lights shine in what we think are spiritual as well as material things, and our works have been seen and admired by the world. But have they glorified Christ? Have they honored his gospel of grace or his atonement for us?

Our works have been seen by one who speaks to us from the dust. Because they make us uncomfortable, we avoid his words or, worse yet, convince ourselves that he is talking to someone else, someone less worthy. Perhaps, we think, he is talking to members of other churches. But he is not. He is talking to us, members of the restored church of the latter-days.

Behold, I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing.

And I know that ye do walk in the pride of your hearts; and there are none save a few only who do not lift themselves up in the pride of their hearts, unto the wearing of very fine apparel, unto envying, and strifes, and malice, and persecutions, and all manner of iniquities; and your churches, yea, even every one, have become polluted because of the pride of your hearts.

For behold, ye do love money, and your substance, and your fine apparel, and the adorning of your churches, more than ye love the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.

O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God? Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? . . .

Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not. (Morm. 8:35-39)

The gospel of works has shrunk our vision of the world. Our lives, our possessions, and our achievements are center stage, foreshortening our awareness of the rest of the world's poverty, suffering, and pain. I believe that we Latter-day Saints are good people. But sometimes our goodness and those works that make us feel worthy diminish our ability to reach beyond our material and spiritual achievements, even beyond our Church callings, to really love and take care of each other in or out of the Church. The people in my Philadelphia stake were good and loving people. They simply didn't know how to fit a poor branch of the Church into their personal gospel of works.

My Latino friends in Philadelphia continue to suffer in deplorable circumstances. That suffering can and does bring them spiritual strength, but there is much that we, as a stake family of Latter-day Saints, could have done to make it more bearable. If we were really living the gospel of grace, we would have rallied all our economic, social, and political power to bring relief to those good people. And even if we could not bring economic, political, or even social relief, then members of the stake could have been there more often with loving arms and compassion. It meant so much to branch members when people of the stake cared enough to attend branch meetings, share their rice and beans at branch fiestas, or even visit in their homes.

Many stake members felt overwhelmed by the problems they saw in North Philadelphia. But I learned that it is possible to bring a measure of relief with just a visit, a smile, or an *abrazzo*, that famous Latino hug! One of the tragedies of this life is not that suffering exists, but that we as good people do so little to try and relieve it or make it bearable.

Too often we soothe our souls with a small donation here or there — old clothes to the AmVets, used and broken toys to an orphanage at Christmastime, a loose coin or two to the person in front of the supermarket holding a can marked "FOR THE HOMELESS." Marden Clark sees us in "Begging the Cumberland Question" (1979).

You've seen them there  
 Two legless pencil-sellers  
 Old, not feeble yet, sitting all day  
 On Center, propped by Penneys or Kress  
 With not quite stumps not quite

Sticking out. Yellow pencils in a hat  
 And hat stuck out, not quite begging,  
 Not quite selling  
 There they sit on Christmas eve  
 Unmoving on a zero walk  
 Except to lift occasionally a hat  
 In mute appeal  
 Like most I hurry past  
 One, the other,  
 Looking across to Levens  
 Or away from Penney's to whatever  
 Can hold my eye till I am safe.  
 Forty steps away the nativity  
 Large and new this year and lighted bright enough  
 To make all pause with wondering awe.  
 Inside half a dozen stores a Santa Claus  
 Too warm in body, color, tone  
 Takes final orders from a generation  
 Knowing nothing of hunger, little of cold.  
 Final orders swell for Mattel.  
 Speakers swell our peace on earth  
 Above the swinging doors  
 Of stores.

Still there.  
 I can't go past again.  
 Fingers pull my hands toward coins  
 That rattle shamelessly and warm.  
 How much? only a nickel?  
 Merry Christmas! My quarter drops  
 Unjingling in the felt. I pick two  
 Yellow, bright, straight, 3H  
 Longer and straighter than stumps  
 That won't balance a man without a store  
 For support.

The other has no pencils left,  
 Just the hat, still mutely thrust.  
 I drop my quarter in.  
 A last-minute bargain for Christmas Eve:  
 For two kind words, two bits apiece I purchase pencils and  
 My Christmas peace.

The atonement of Christ is a gift of salvation. The rescue has already taken place; the price has already been paid. We are free to love and serve each other rather than worrying so much about ourselves. In some personal correspondence, Fred Voros shared this analogy with me: Our rich uncle dies, leaving us millions of dollars. No longer needing to work, we are now free to dedicate our life to volunteer service. Christ's gift, in an eternal and spiritual way, is that

million dollars. It frees us “from the pressure of accumulating good works as spiritual capital and lets us focus on others.”

With this understanding, we can see the world outside of ourselves. We are then better prepared to “bear one another’s burdens that they may be light . . . to mourn with those who mourn, to comfort those that stand in need of comfort,” and, by doing *his works*, to stand “as a witness of God at all times and in all things and in all places” (Mosiah 18:8-9).

Peter and John were on their way to the temple when they saw a lame man. Their quest for personal righteousness or eternal rewards did not blind them to human need. They stopped immediately when they saw the lame man in front of the temple. They didn’t ask for his temple recommend, question his motive, blame his handicap on something he should or should not have done. They weren’t offended by his appearance, his dirtiness, or his begging. They weren’t concerned about proper dress or place or even if they had the proper ordinance memorized. They simply said, “Look on us.” The lame beggar looked up, expecting food or money. Instead, Peter offered him some of the most powerful words in the scriptures, “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” Peter then reached down, “took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked” (Acts 3:1-8). In this one simple act of grace, in forgetting where they were going or what they had to do, Peter and John bore powerful witness of Christ and his teachings. They became leaders as Christ had taught, serving the least of God’s children.

Many of our current attitudes about leadership in the Church are based on the doctrine of works. Positions of high leadership presuppose respect and recognition for spiritual, if not professional, achievement. Names are published in the *Church News* in the “New Mission Presidents, New Regional Representatives, New Stake Presidents” sections, along with past positions in the Church.

We are taught to respect the offices of leadership rather than to love the men who occupy them. We seat our leaders on the stand in front of and above us and pass the sacrament to them first. Their positions of leadership bring with them new titles (which we think they have earned)—bishop, president, or elder—rather than their sacred given names by which we knew them as friends. And then, after giving them the position, the title, and the office, we expect them to live perfect lives, be perfect leaders, have a perfect understanding of the gospel, give perfect wisdom and counsel. In short, we expect them to



live up to their resumé's. We are taught to defer to their counsel and judgment, which tacitly teaches us to mistrust our own.

Some individuals, as we are cautioned in Doctrine and Covenants 121, believing in their own righteousness, power, and wisdom, begin to "counsel" us on every subject possible. They tell us what is good art, how to vote, how to dress, how to conduct our funerals, how to think, what to write, where to speak, and where to publish. They tell us to keep our thoughts and our questions to ourselves, not to gather together in private study groups, and by no means to lend our "good names" to organizations such as Sunstone and DIALOGUE. Some leaders want us to listen rather than lobby, to follow without question rather than to think and feel for ourselves as God has intended. Still others, believing in the ultimate power and authority of their positions, have used that power against other members of the Church. Ecclesiastical authority under the gospel of grace would never jeopardize a member's livelihood, good name, temple recommend, or even a well-earned pension after years of service in order to silence an alternate voice, to compel obedience, or force compliance with a certain leader's personal counsel or direction. Doctrine and Covenants 121:36-37 needs to be read and reread until we truly understand what the Lord means:

[T]he rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and . . . the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness.

. . . [T]hey may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.

It is the gospel of works which has led us to believe that we must "follow the brethren" because they have earned their leadership positions through dedication, hard work, and spiritual superiority. We seem to have created our own Mormon cult of personality.

Last year I delivered some last minute items (money, of course!) to my son at the Mission Training Center in Provo, Utah. Accompanied by my other children, I met him and his companion in the lobby, gave him his things, took a family photo, and exchanged final goodbyes and hugs before he was to leave for his field of labor. It wasn't until we had the film processed that we discovered, hanging on the wall behind the sofa in the MTC lobby (and I assume along the entire end of the room), the photos of General Authorities. I was surprised at this. Instead of board room photos of Church administrators, I would have expected photos of missionaries in various activities in their fields of labor or

even artists' depictions of scenes from the life of Christ, whose message these young people were about to proclaim to the world.

Those photos on the wall say much about the importance of ecclesiastical position in the Church, in spite of what we read or hear about it not mattering where in the Church we serve, or how one member is not more important in God's eyes than another.

Church members, lesson manuals, and sacrament meeting talks frequently offer more of the counsel, teachings, and writings of General Authorities than the holy words of Christ. Many Saints attempt to follow our leaders' professional and ecclesiastical examples of success. In our desire to be obedient, we sometimes follow leaders through their own personal mazes of mistakes, weaknesses, and sins. And, because they say that obedience is the first law of heaven, if they are wrong, we seem to think we are absolved of any wrong-doing ourselves. In all of this I am confused.

Nephi warned us to not put our trust "in the arm of flesh" (2 Ne. 4:34; D&C 1:16), and Christ himself told us that "it is not meet that we should be commanded in all things" (D&C 58:26-29). Our leaders have much to give us. We should listen to them with love and confirm and validate what they say through the spirit. We are then, as a community of Saints, none better than the other, able to listen to what is said, discuss it together, and even at times disagree in the spirit of love and fellowship.

The gospel of grace teaches us that a leadership position should not presuppose personal perfection or even preeminence in spiritual matters just because of past professional, economic, or ecclesiastical accomplishments. Because of his great humility and genuine love for his people, King Benjamin was able to honestly and publicly say that although he was king, he viewed himself as no better than the people themselves (Mosiah 2:26). Rather than relying on the arm of flesh, Moroni exhorts us to "come unto Christ and be perfected in him" (Moro. 10:32). I believe we mean well when we encourage each other to "follow the brethren"; but it is Christ whom we must follow, through Gethsemane to Golgotha and beyond to our spiritual home.

It is the gospel of grace that persuades me to love and respect Church leaders just as I esteem the sisters and brothers in my own ward. I could not hope to have a finer bishop or stake president. In spite of what they know about my own personal struggles, doubts, and sins, they accept and love me and count me as a friend. Their selflessness and love inform my life and my relationships with others.

I respect the General Authorities of the Church and thrill to watch President Benson stand and sing the hymns with us in general conference. Although he does not know who I am, I feel his special love and

concern for me. I sustain and support our Church leaders and respect their decision to leave the world and dedicate themselves to a full life of service. I appreciate the candor of Boyd K. Packer, not unlike that of King Benjamin (see Mosiah 2:10-11), when he tells us that he and other Church leaders struggle for inspiration just like the rest of us.

We who have been called to lead the Church are ordinary men and women with ordinary capacities struggling to administer a church which grows at such a pace as to astound even those who watch it closely. Some are disposed to find fault with us; surely that is easy for them to do. A call to lead is not an exemption from the challenges of life. We seek for inspiration in the same way that you do, and we must obey the same laws which apply to every member of the Church. (Packer 1989, 16)

Though I had not felt a particular closeness to Elder Packer in the past, his honest and gracious sharing of personal feelings has brought me closer to him, thus making it easier to listen to him in the future.

I admire the willingness of Church leaders to minister rather than administer. I feel especially close to them when they choose love instead of power. I heed their humble and gentle persuasion to repentance and am touched deeply by their heartfelt and moving pleas, like that of Vaughn J. Featherstone, to those who have left the Church to come back home and enjoy the sweet fellowship of the Saints (Featherstone 1982, 73). I was encouraged by Hugh Pinnock's speech in the April 1989 general conference entitled "Now Is the Time" (ironically delivered in the same conference with three other speeches that essentially told us to stop thinking, writing, or speaking for ourselves). Elder Pinnock suggests it is time to ask, "What is happening to us? Why do we rely upon others for our opinions, our directions, our activities, and even our vocabulary? It is time to say, 'Whoa, stop. I want to take personal responsibility for my actions.' Now is the time to stop blaming others, the government, the Church, or our circumstances for what might disturb us. It is time to take responsibility for ourselves" (1989, 12).

Most of all, however, I am thrilled and spiritually moved when leaders, like Richard G. Scott in a recent conference address, bear with love and spiritual power their special witness of the testimony of Jesus Christ (Scott 1988, 77). Then I feel respected, loved, and motivated to live the gospel of Jesus Christ and to serve my sisters and brothers in love.

In spite of these positive feelings and experiences, the gospel of works still intrudes into what should be the domain of grace. It has influenced the way we conduct our bishop's and high council courts. So-called courts of love actually punish people and make them pay for

their sins. The internal mechanism of the court seems to be discipline, rather than the grace of Christ.

When I was called onto a high council in Philadelphia a few years ago, I was saddened by the courts on which I was called to participate. Though we were dealing only with men, I'm sure women face similar ordeals in bishops' courts. Even the physical arrangement of the court seemed planned to overwhelm and intimidate the one called to account for his actions. Flanked by his counselors, the stake president sat at the head of a large U-shaped table. Down each leg of the U sat six high councilors. The defendant, usually alone, sat away from the end of the open part of the U, out in the open, exposed and vulnerable.

Charges were read by the stake president after which members of the high council questioned the accused. The questions were often unfeeling, immaterial, sometimes humiliating, and often intimate to the point of bordering on voyeurism. The accused was then ushered out of the room while the high council and then the stake presidency deliberated. This usually took at least an hour while the accused waited and thought about his potential fate.

When the stake president finally announced his decision, I would feel empty inside for the man who had been through the ordeal. The president would close the court by reminding us that it was a court of love, conducted for the good of the one who had sinned. If the verdict was excommunication, the man was then ushered into the president's office where, as I was later made to understand, he was reminded that if he came to church meetings he was not to participate in any way, not take the sacrament, not pray, not speak in meetings, and not even pay tithing.

I could not help but compare those experiences with that of the woman taken in adultery by the scribes and Pharisees and brought before Jesus. After presenting her to the Master and explaining her sin, they quoted him the law and asked, "But what sayest thou?" They cared nothing for the woman and were really trying to tempt the Savior, "that they might have to accuse him." But, ignoring them, Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger. Seeking resolution, they continued to ask until Jesus finally lifted himself up and said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." He then resumed his writing on the ground. When they began to understand what he had said, they went away "one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst."

The Master could have then let the woman go her own way but did not. He knew that she had been shamed, humiliated, disgraced.

She did not need punishment, but love. “Woman, where are those thine accusers?” he asked. “Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8:1-11).

Christ, the lawgiver, was not condoning adultery. It was he, the great Jehovah, who had given the law to Moses in the first place. What he was doing was ministering to her, rather than worrying about her sin. After all, he, the Savior of the world, was about to carry her burden of sin, as well as those of all people, into the Garden of Gethsemane. Lowell Bennion has observed, “The woman who stood before him needed encouragement, compassion, mercy. She was greater in the eyes of Jesus than even the law of Moses. So, in his response to the situation, he employed another principle of the gospel—love—because that was what she needed at the moment and under the circumstances” (1980, 26).

The gospel of grace teaches us that the primary function of any ecclesiastical action should be to comfort and love the sinner, to persuade those who have sinned to repent and lay their burden at the feet of Christ and “go and sin no more.” The sinner’s self-esteem should be rebuilt, and the wounds of sin dressed. Encouragement, compassion, and mercy will enable healing to begin.

Ecclesiastical punishment has no place in a gospel of grace. We are all sinners around the table of judgment. We all need Christ’s atoning sacrifice. Who among us, regardless of power, position, or authority, is without sin? Who among us is sufficiently righteous or worthy to cast the first stone? The ecclesiastical requirement of grace is to love and forgive unconditionally and through that love, to gently persuade the sinner to repentance and back into the arms of Christ.

The gospel of grace teaches that people are to be forgiven and loved, to be regarded, regardless of their sins, “as valuable as our own person, as valuable as the person of God” (Toscano 1989, 7). The call to leadership in a gospel of grace is a call to love, to make oneself equal to those served. Whether as bishop, teacher, Relief Society president, or General Authority, our charge is to love those we serve and to treat them with “reciprocal esteem and dignity” (Toscano 1989, 7). Elder Dallin Oaks helps us understand that the gospel of grace calls us to serve each other for “the highest reason of all . . . the love of God and the love of his children. . . . Such service must be free of selfish ambition. It must be motivated only by the pure love of Christ” (1984, 14-15). And, as Donlu Thayer has observed,

[T]he pure love of Christ can never fail. It is always an extension towards others; always a bond; always kind, patient, generous. It is not blind to faults,

but there is no self-interest in its discernment of the failings of others. It seeks life and light for all. In feeling this love, this desire for me, I felt regarded by God, seen, called by my name. I saw that he did not descend below all things in order to remain forever remote from the struggling creature below. He descended in order to be with me, so that I could be with him. Seeing this, I understood, at last, what people are for: they are to be with, in their sorrow and in their joy. (1988, 19)

The gospel of grace broadens personal perspective to focus attention outside of self-interest, self-improvement, and self-salvation. It frees us to ask what we can do to help and love those around us, rather than what we must do to be saved. We are free to help make the world a better place, to increase joy and happiness in the lives of our worldwide sisters and brothers. Rather than worrying if we have enough money for our needs, we consider the lilies of the field and ask what we can do to relieve the suffering and pain of the poor among us. We recognize that, as King Benjamin taught, all are deserving of love, compassion, and comfort (see Mosiah 2:18, 4:19–25). This may sound impractical, even overwhelming. But as Mother Teresa has demonstrated, even though we cannot solve the world's problems by ourselves, we can begin to relieve suffering, one person at a time.

For too much of my own life, I was searching everywhere for the face of Christ except where it can truly be found—in the faces of my sisters and brothers in the Spanish Ward, in the faces of my own ward members, in the faces of my children, in the face of my wife. I mentioned earlier that while I believe the grace of Christ is sufficient for us all, sometimes it seems that our grace for each other is not. Our lesson from the doctrine of grace as taught in the Book of Mormon is that “to continue experiencing the Atonement with Christ after we have received his grace, we must extend it to others” (England 1989, 50).

By living the gospel of grace, by selflessly doing the works of Christ, by canning tuna or taking tuna casseroles to the sick, by sharing our daughters and sons in missionary work with the world or by loving our neighbors so that we ourselves are missionaries in our own communities, by loving and teaching each other as Primary teachers or General Authorities, by joining our sisters and brothers in holy ritual at the temple or by sharing our thoughts and feelings in love with each other at the Sunstone Symposium or in “alternate voices” publications, we can extend the grace of Christ to others. As we grow grace for grace, we will begin to find the image of Christ in our own countenances. We will discover ourselves as we really are; not leaders or followers but sisters and brothers, children of God; not Iron Rodders or Liahonas, “not faith or doubt but both, not you and me but us, not the

arching or the straight trajectory [of our concepts of] the world but Zion" (Jolley 1989, 6).

There are those who worry that the doctrine of grace will breed a generation of people in the Church who, on finding grace, will sit back and ride out the journey to salvation on the backs of those who have decided to work and earn their way into the celestial kingdom. It may come as a surprise to those who are critics of the doctrine to know that quite the opposite is true. And if it has not been said clearly enough to be understood before, I hope to do so now. We who believe in grace also believe profoundly in works. We do not, however, believe in those works that are done to consciously earn us merit here on earth and rewards of exaltation in heaven. We believe in doing the works of Christ, the works which, through the gift of the atonement, we are free to do out of peace rather than the stress of self-salvation, out of love rather than compulsion.

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