

Maximizing the Effect of the Atonement

Ryan Constantine April, 2012

D&C 76:40-42

40 And this is the gospel, the glad tidings, which the voice out of the heavens bore record unto us—

41 That he came into the world, even Jesus, to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness;

42 That through him all might be saved whom the Father had put into his power and made by him;

Although, as a church, we are good about remembering and talking about the atonement of Christ throughout the year, we do take special time out at Easter each year to take particular note of this singular event in human history. I hope that for each of you, this time will be filled with family celebration, scripture study, and quiet contemplation, followed by an increased commitment to follow our Savior and to maximize the effect of the atonement in your life.

It is the subject of maximizing the effect of the atonement in our lives that I would like to speak today.

Romans 3:23 informs us that "... all have sinned, and come short

of the glory of God.”

Mosiah 3:19 adds, “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father.”

These attributes just listed are a small portion of what it is we must become to gain entrance to the celestial kingdom of our Father in Heaven. The beatitudes list more attributes, and others are listed elsewhere in the scriptures.

All of our actions should be centered in Christ and it is my opinion that focusing on the following principles will allow us to do just that and to progress step by step and acquire the attributes required to enter the celestial kingdom of God, putting off the natural man and repenting of our sins.

1. Seek knowledge of the mysteries of God
2. Develop and continue to increase your personal integrity
3. Seek to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost 24 hours a day,

7 days a week

Let us look at each of these, in turn.

1. Seek knowledge of the mysteries of God

The prophet Joseph Smith has said, "We cannot keep all the commandments without first knowing them, and we cannot expect to know all, or more than we now know unless we comply with or keep those we have already received."

And also, "A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge, for if he does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity by some evil power in the other world, as evil spirits will have more knowledge, and consequently more power than many men who are on the earth. Hence it needs revelation to assist us, and give us knowledge of the things of God."

We have been commanded and instructed to gain all worthy knowledge that we can. D & C 93:53 reads in part "... obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man, and all this for the salvation of Zion." Also, in D & C 88:118: "seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith."

Where possible, we are to seek higher education at the best schools. We are to instruct ourselves through books and other means even after we finish formal training or earn degrees. A recent study showed that we Mormon's are not as educated as we thought. Of various religions, Jews rank highest in advanced degrees per capita. LDS ranked about the same as protestants. Atheists ranked second to Jews. In Brigham Young's time, he lamented that he knew more about gardening than his gardener. He suggested that the saints of God should do better in all fields of study than those not of our faith.

I can't say that his concerns are not still valid today. Brigham Young counseled the saints to use much of their leisure time in the pursuit of knowledge. A study of his life shows that he was a good example of this.

Ask yourself, when was the last time you read a book in order to learn something? How many books have you read? What was the last class you took? Do you have hobbies like gardening or woodworking which develop useful skills?

Many people make the excuse that they don't have time, or money to learn new things; or that they can only learn using certain methods. If you aren't a book-learner, for example, then take the Lord up on His promise to make weak things strong, and work at it until you are good at it. Remember, D & C 88:118 counseled us to learn by both study AND

faith.

Of course, the subjects and skills we find in the world are of little importance if we do not also learn the words and will of God as found in his Holy Scriptures and as taught by our modern prophets. We learn in 2 Ne 9 that "... to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God." The things contained in scripture are of eternal worth and can not be emphasized enough. Too little time is spent in their pages.

Said Joseph Smith, "The things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity — thou must commune with God."

Many tools are available to us. LDS.org and the mobile Gospel Library contain all of the scriptures, church magazines as far back as 1971, conference talks back to 1974, all of the curricula for Sunday school, seminary, and institute, and more. Add to that the rich resources at maxwellinstitute.byu.edu including scholarly analyses of the scriptures, insights into the ancient Near East, numerous publications, transcriptions of talks by church leaders and scholars, and still more.

BYU also has available online, scans of all or nearly all church magazines and newspapers going all the way back to the beginning of the church. Add to all of this the new web site launched by the church called *The Joseph Smith Papers*. This project was recently begun and aims to digitize and add commentary to all of the writings of the prophet.

With so much available to us, what will our answer be to the Lord at the judgment bar when He asks us how we used these tremendous blessings? What will be our excuses for why we did not learn His will and His ways? Earnestly studying from available material will help us in our quest to understand the atonement so that it can have full effect in our lives.

2. Develop and continue to increase your personal integrity

In the book, *Mormon Doctrine*, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, "The complete development of man's moral character in conformity with principles of justice and uprightness is termed *integrity*. A man of integrity is sound, incorruptible, and particularly strict about fulfilling the trusts reposed in him by others." - now pay careful attention to this part - "*The highest manifestation of integrity is exhibited by those who conform their conduct to the terms of those gospel covenants and promises which they have made.* Integrity goes hand in hand with

uprightness and righteousness, and the Lord loves those who have integrity of heart.”

We develop and grow our integrity when we keep and make commitments. Such commitments can be to wives, children, coworkers, friends, employers, and so forth. However, the most important commitments are made to yourself and to God. Commitments to God are often made in the form of formal covenants; baptism, endowment, and marriage in the temple are examples.

Wherever you are in your development of this divine attribute, analyze and grade your performance on a daily basis. Before you lay down at night to rest, make an accounting of what you said you would do that day and whether you did it. Note areas that need improvement and then take the necessary steps to do so. Discuss these things with your Heavenly Father and ask for His help in accomplishing them.

Jesus Christ is our perfect example of what it means to have integrity. Even as the suffering in the garden was upon Him, our Savior kept His commitment to His Father to complete the work He was sent to do saying, “thy will be done.” As you study the scriptures in earnest, *you* will find opportunities to make new commitments and new covenants.

You will find promises from the Lord, wherein if you obey the requirements, you will reap the associated blessings. Developing your integrity will allow you to grow line upon line and precept upon precept, and learn to draw on the grace and mercy of Christ, thereby allowing the atonement to have greater effect in your life.

3. Seek to have the companionship of the Holy Ghost 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

To become a member of the church, each of us was baptized. That ordinance was followed by the Gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands. This gift was not unconditional. In the prayer that accompanied it, we were commanded to *receive* the Holy Ghost. The companionship of the Holy Ghost was not given to us at no cost. While we all recognize that this is an important gift and that the command to receive it is an important distinction, I think few of us deliberately pursue its companionship.

Consider if you will, a bucket with a lid which represents you. You are born into this world as an empty bucket - clean, and without spot. As you learn and grow, experiences begin to fill you up. Some of your experiences are good and contribute pure, clean water to your bucket. Others contribute oil. This oil comes not just from sin, but from sorrow,

heartache, and the other varied vicissitudes of life. Because you are mortal, you - as a bucket - have a hole in the bottom and, since oil floats on top of water, it is the water that drains out, not the oil. Additionally, there is a lid on top which can only be removed by the grace of Jesus. His grace allows repentance to ladle out the oil.

Elder McConkie wrote, "To gain salvation every accountable person must receive two baptisms. They are baptism of water and of the Spirit. The baptism of the Spirit is called the *baptism of fire and of the Holy ghost*. By the power of the Holy Ghost — who is the Sanctifier — dross, iniquity, carnality, sensuality, and every evil thing is burned out of the repentant soul as if by fire; the cleansed person becomes literally a new creature of the Holy Ghost. He is born again.

The baptism of fire is not something in addition to the receipt of the Holy Ghost; rather, it is the actual enjoyment of the gift which is offered by the laying on of hands at the time of baptism."

Knowing this, that the gift you received at baptism is the selfsame one that purifies you for the celestial kingdom, let us consider the bucket once more. What is the best way to remove the oil completely and permanently? If you can permanently remove the lid, what happens if you fill the bucket to overflowing with water? The oil, being on top, will

spill out first so that only the pure water remains. Any further oil added will likewise spill out so long as more water is put in than leaks out. In this manner, you could say that the bucket has had its calling and election made sure and has been sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise. The key then perhaps, is saturation; in making the filling of the bucket our goal. I have mentioned studying the Word and increasing our personal integrity as two activities that will aid us in this goal of saturation. Allow me to list a few additional things that you can do each week to fill your bucket with the goodness necessary for the companionship and purification of the Holy Ghost.

1. Daily personal scripture study
2. Daily family scripture study
3. Daily family gospel discussion
4. Weekly family home evening
5. Daily family prayer morning and night
6. Personal prayer morning and night
7. My favorite, is to get an iPod, load it with church talks, and listen to it on your commute, while working out, or while doing chores or other more or less mindless tasks
8. Begin and end the day with time for these and other tasks for yourself
9. Reflect on the day before bed and repent as needed

10. Read worthy books

11. Don't surf the Internet or television without a specific objective

12. Daily, look for one kindness you can do for your family

If we start with just some of these things, the others will follow.

Our desires to do good will increase as we begin to enjoy the gift of the Holy Ghost more regularly. Its purifying power will begin to work in us. Our perspective on what is important and how we wish to spend our time will begin to change. We will see more easily and more acutely what our faults are, will want to fix them, and will call upon the mercies of the Savior in sincere repentance and supplication. A cycle will begin in us that can, if we are diligent, result in our becoming sanctified, as Christ's atonement was meant to make us.

While the three-point list I have presented are things that we can do to move us along the path to return to God and to use the atonement of Jesus Christ in our lives, make no mistake — our works will not save us; only the grace of our savior can do that — but we cannot expect that His grace will claim us from the grip of justice without consistent and determined effort on our part.

In conclusion, some words from Joseph Smith: "If you wish to go

where God is, you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses, for if we are not drawing towards God in principle, we are going from Him and drawing towards the devil.”

May we all strive to learn God’s will, increase in our integrity so that we can live it, and strive to maintain the companionship of the Holy Ghost, that we will be purified in the manner which is the very object and design of the atonement of Jesus Christ and thereby be made fit to inherit the celestial glory that we were created for, is my prayer for us all in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.