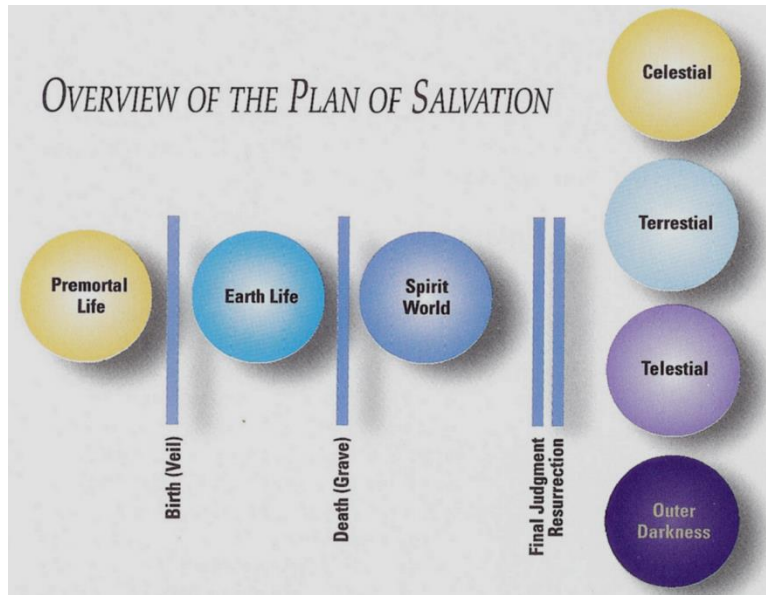


Understanding the Grace of Christ

(Source: Brad Wilcox - His Grace Is Sufficient - BYU Devotional July 12, 2011)

Christ's Grace Is Sufficient to Cover Us

- This month our lessons are based on trying to be more Christ like. Unfortunately, one of our biggest problems is that we don't really understand much about Jesus or his attributes. So how can we emulate (try to be like) we don't really know much about? Let me show you what I mean.
- Show drawings of "the plan of salvation."
- ? What's missing from these drawings?
- ? How can you have salvation without Christ?
- ? Is Jesus Christ our Savior? (Yes.) What does that mean?
- ? How does Jesus save us?



(8) For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do. (2 Nephi 25:23)

- ? What are these two scriptures trying to teach us?
- ? Are they saying the same thing? What is the difference?
- Draw the "God & Us" picture on the board.
- ? As you move from the bottom to the top, what must you do? How much is your part? How much is Christ's part? Draw a line showing how much is your part and how much is Christ's part.
- There is no line. Jesus filled the whole space. He paid our debt in full. He didn't pay it all except for a few coins. He paid it all. It is finished. You pay none of the debt. You have nothing to pay with. We are lost, fallen, and flat broke.
- We have fallen to the bottom of a deep, dark well. The walls are smooth and we can't climb out. We have no rope. And even if we did have a rope, what could we tie it to?



Unless someone hears us calling for help and lowers a rope to pull us out, we will die at the bottom of the well.

Wherefore, all mankind were in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save they should rely on this Redeemer. **(1 Nephi 10:6)**

7 Behold, he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered.

8 Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise. **(2 Nephi 2:7–8)**

- Jesus doesn't make up the difference. Jesus makes all the difference.

Christ's Grace Is Sufficient to Transform Us

- Since Christ paid our entire debt, is there anything that we must do?

16 And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice; therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption.

17 Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you; **(Alma 34:16–17)**

4 And even unto the great and last day, when all people, and all kindreds, and all nations and tongues shall stand before God, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—**(3 Nephi 26:4)**

- ? If Christ pays for our sins and brings us back to the presence of God, why are we judged by our works?
- ? What do we really have to do, and what are we doing it for?
- We have plenty to do, but it is not to pay for our sins. We will all be resurrected. We will all go back to God's presence. What is left to be determined by our obedience is what kind of body we plan on being resurrected with (celestial, terrestrial, telestial) and how comfortable we will be in God's presence and how long we want to stay there.
- When we have faith in Christ, and repent, and make and keep covenants, we are not paying the demands of justice—not even the smallest part. We are showing appreciation for what Jesus Christ did for us by using it to live a life like His.
- Justice requires immediate perfection—or punishment when we fall short. Because Jesus took that punishment, He offers us the opportunity to become perfect (see Matthew 5:48, 3 Nephi 12:48) and he helps us reach that goal. He can forgive what

justice never could, and He can turn to us now with His own set of requirements (see 2 Nephi 2:7; 3 Nephi 9:20).

- ? So if our work is required by Jesus instead of justice, isn't that still the same thing?
 - No. Our efforts are required for a different purpose.
- ? What is the difference between paying a mortgage and paying rent?
- ? What is the difference between making deposits in a savings account and paying off a debt.
 - This is the difference Christ's atonement makes for us. We still have to work, but it is for a totally different reason. It is not to pay for sin, it is to make us like him, perfect and godly.

Parable of the Piano Lessons

Your mother pays a piano teacher to give you piano lessons. Because she pays the debt in full, she can turn to you and ask for something. What does she expect you to do? Practice! Does your practice pay the piano teacher? No.

Does your practice repay your mother for paying the piano teacher? No.

Practicing is how you show appreciation for your mother's incredible gift. It is how you take advantage of the amazing opportunity your mother is giving you to live your life at a higher level. Your mother's joy is not getting repaid but in seeing her gift used—seeing her child improve. And so she continues to ask you to practice, practice, practice.

If you see your mother's requirement of practice as being too overbearing (“Gosh, Mom, why do I need to practice? None of the other kids have to practice! I’m just going to be a football star anyway”), perhaps it is because you don't yet see with your mother's eyes. You don't see how much better your life could be if you would choose to live on a higher plane.

In the same way, because Jesus has paid justice, He can now turn to us and say, “Follow me” (Matthew 4:19), “Keep my commandments” (John 14:15). If we see His requirements as being way too much to ask (“Gosh! None of the other Christians have to pay tithing! None of the other Christians have to go on missions, serve in callings, and do temple work!”), maybe it is because we do not yet see through Christ's eyes. We have not yet comprehended what He is trying to make of us.

- Elder Bruce C. Hafen wrote, “The great Mediator asks for our repentance *not* because we must ‘repay’ him in exchange for his paying our debt to justice, but because repentance initiates a developmental process that, with the Savior’s help, leads us along the path to a saintly character” (*The Broken Heart* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989], 149; emphasis in original).
- Elder Dallin H. Oaks said, “The repenting sinner must suffer for his sins, but this suffering has a different purpose than punishment or payment. Its purpose is *change*” (*The Lord’s Way* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991], 223; emphasis in original).
- In terms of our piano lesson analogy, you must practice the piano, but practice has a different purpose than punishment or payment. Its purpose is change.
- Sometimes our born-again Christian friends will say to us, “You Mormons are trying to *earn* your way to heaven.” And we should answer, “No, we are not earning heaven. We are *learning* heaven. We are preparing for it (see D&C 78:7). We are practicing for it.”

- When they ask, “Have you been saved by grace?” We should answer, “Yes. Absolutely, totally, completely, thankfully—yes!”
- The question that we should ask them is: “Have you been *changed* by grace?” They are so excited about being saved that maybe they are not thinking enough about what comes next. They are so happy the debt is paid that they may not have considered why the debt existed in the first place. Latter-day Saints know not only what Jesus has saved us from but also what He has saved us for.
- Brett Sanders said, “A life impacted by grace eventually begins to look like Christ’s life.”
- Omar Canals said, “While many Christians view Christ’s suffering as only a huge favor He did for us, Latter-day Saints also recognize it as a huge investment He made in us.”
- Moroni said, grace isn’t just about being saved. It is also about becoming like the Savior (see Moroni 7:48).
- The miracle of the Atonement is not just that we can live after we die but that we can live more abundantly (see John 10:10). The miracle of the Atonement is not just that we can be cleansed and consoled but that we can be transformed (see Romans 8). Scriptures make it clear that no unclean thing can dwell with God (see Alma 40:26), but, brothers and sisters, no unchanged thing will even want to.

I know a young man who just got out of prison—again. Each time two roads diverge in a yellow wood, he takes the wrong one—every time. When he was a teenager dealing with every bad habit a teenage boy can have, I said to his father, “We need to get him to EFY.” I have worked with that program since 1985. I know the good it can do.

His dad said, “I can’t afford that.”

I said, “I can’t afford it either, but you put some in, and I’ll put some in, and then we’ll go to my mom, because she is a real softy.”

We finally got the kid to EFY, but how long do you think he lasted? Not even a day. By the end of the first day he called his mother and said, “Get me out of here!” Heaven will not be heaven for those who have not chosen to be heavenly.

In the past I had a picture in my mind of what the final judgment would be like, and it went something like this: Jesus standing there with a clipboard and Brad standing on the other side of the room nervously looking at Jesus.

Jesus checks His clipboard and says, “Oh, shoot, Brad. You missed it by two points.”

Brad begs Jesus, “Please, check the essay question one more time! There have to be two points you can squeeze out of that essay.” That’s how I always saw it.

But the older I get, and the more I understand this wonderful *plan of redemption*, the more I realize that in the final judgment it will *not* be the unrepentant sinner begging Jesus, “Let me stay.” No, he will probably be saying, “Get me out of here!” Knowing Christ’s character, I believe that if anyone is going to be begging on that occasion, it would probably be Jesus begging the unrepentant sinner, “Please, choose to stay. Please, use my Atonement—not just to be cleansed but to be changed so that you *want* to stay.”

The miracle of the Atonement is not just that we can go home but that—miraculously—we can feel at home there. If Christ did not require faith and repentance, then there would be no desire to change. Think of your friends and family members who have chosen to live without faith and without repentance. They don’t want to change. They are not trying to abandon sin and become comfortable with God. Rather, they are trying to abandon God and become comfortable with sin. If Jesus did not require covenants and bestow the gift of the Holy Ghost, then there would be no way to change. We would be left forever with only willpower, with no access to His power. If Jesus did not require

endurance to the end, then there would be no internalization of those changes over time. They would forever be surface and cosmetic rather than sinking inside us and becoming part of us—part of who we are. Put simply, if Jesus didn't require practice, then we would never become pianists.

Christ's Grace Is Sufficient to Help Us

“But Brother Wilcox, don't you realize how hard it is to practice? I'm just not very good at the piano. I hit a lot of wrong notes. It takes me forever to get it right.” Now wait. Isn't that all part of the learning process? When a young pianist hits a wrong note, we don't say he is not worthy to keep practicing. We don't expect him to be flawless. We just expect him to keep trying. Perfection may be his ultimate goal, but for now we can be content with progress in the right direction. Why is this perspective so easy to see in the context of learning piano but so hard to see in the context of learning heaven?

Too many are giving up on the Church because they are tired of constantly feeling like they are falling short. They have tried in the past, but they always feel like they are just not good enough. They don't understand grace.

There are young women who know they are daughters of a Heavenly Father who loves them, and they love Him. Then they graduate from high school, and the values they memorized are put to the test. They slip up. They let things go too far, and suddenly they think it is all over. These young women don't understand grace.

There are young men who grow up their whole lives singing, “I hope they call me on a mission,” and then they do actually grow a foot or two and flake out completely. They get their Eagles, graduate from high school, and go away to college. Then suddenly these young men find out how easy it is to *not* be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, or reverent. They mess up. They say, “I'll never do it again,” and then they do it. They say, “I'll never do it again,” and then they do it. They say, “This is stupid. I will never do it again.” And then they do it. The guilt is almost unbearable. They don't dare talk to a bishop. Instead, they hide. They say, “I can't do this Mormon thing. I've tried, and the expectations are just way too high.” So they quit. These young men don't understand grace.

I know returned missionaries who come home and slip back into bad habits they thought were over. They break promises made before God, angels, and witnesses, and they are convinced there is no hope for them now. They say, “Well, I've blown it. There is no use in even trying anymore.” Seriously? These young people have spent entire missions teaching people about Jesus Christ and His Atonement, and now they think there is no hope for them? These returned missionaries don't understand grace.

I know young married couples who find out after the sealing ceremony is over that marriage requires adjustments. The pressures of life mount, and stress starts taking its toll financially, spiritually, and even sexually. Mistakes are made. Walls go up. And pretty soon these husbands and wives are talking with divorce lawyers rather than talking with each other. These couples don't understand grace.

In all of these cases there should never be just two options: perfection or giving up. When learning the piano, are the only options performing at Carnegie Hall or quitting? No. Growth and development take time. Learning takes time. When we understand grace, we understand that God is long-suffering, that change is a process, and that repentance is a pattern in our lives. When we understand grace, we understand that the blessings of Christ's Atonement are continuous and His strength is perfect in our weakness (see 2 Corinthians 12:9). When we understand grace, we can, as it says in the Doctrine and Covenants, “continue in patience until [we] are perfected” (D&C 67:13).

One young man wrote me the following e-mail: “I know God has all power, and I know He will help me if I'm worthy, but I'm just never worthy enough to ask for His help. I want Christ's grace, but I always find myself stuck in the same self-defeating and impossible position: no work, no grace.”

I wrote him back and testified with all my heart that Christ is not waiting at the finish line once we have done “all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23). He is with us every step of the way.

Elder Bruce C. Hafen has written, “The Savior's gift of grace to us is not necessarily limited in time to ‘after’ all we can do. We may receive his grace before, during and after the time when we expend our own efforts” (*The Broken Heart* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989], 155). So grace is not a booster

engine that kicks in once our fuel supply is exhausted. Rather, it is our constant energy source. It is not the light at the end of the tunnel but the light that moves us through the tunnel. Grace is not achieved somewhere down the road. It is received right here and right now. It is not a finishing touch; it is the Finisher's touch (see Hebrews 12:2).

In twelve days we celebrate Pioneer Day. The first company of Saints entered the Salt Lake Valley on July 24, 1847. Their journey was difficult and challenging; still, they sang:

Come, come, ye Saints, no toil nor labor fear;

But with joy wend your way.

Though hard to you this journey may appear,

Grace shall be as your day.

[“Come, Come, Ye Saints,” *Hymns*, 2002, no. 30]

“Grace shall be as your day”—what an interesting phrase. We have all sung it hundreds of times, but have we stopped to consider what it means? “Grace shall be as your day”: grace shall be like a day. As dark as night may become, we can always count on the sun coming up. As dark as our trials, sins, and mistakes may appear, we can always have confidence in the grace of Jesus Christ. Do we earn a sunrise? No. Do we have to be worthy of a chance to begin again? No. We just have to accept these blessings and take advantage of them. As sure as each brand-new day, grace—the enabling power of Jesus Christ—is constant. Faithful pioneers knew they were not alone. The task ahead of them was never as great as the power behind them.

Conclusion

The grace of Christ is sufficient—sufficient to cover our debt, sufficient to transform us, and sufficient to help us as long as that transformation process takes. The Book of Mormon teaches us to rely solely on “the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8). As we do, we do not discover—as some Christians believe—that Christ requires nothing of us. Rather, we discover the reason He requires so much and the strength to do all He asks (see Philippians 4:13). Grace is not the absence of God's high expectations. Grace is the presence of God's power (see Luke 1:37).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell once said the following:

Now may I speak . . . to those buffeted by false insecurity, who, though laboring devotedly in the Kingdom, have recurring feelings of falling forever short. . . .

. . . This feeling of inadequacy is . . . normal. There is no way the Church can honestly describe where we must yet go and what we must yet do without creating a sense of immense distance. . . .

*. . . This is a gospel of grand expectations, but God's grace is sufficient for each of us. [CR, October 1976, 14, 16; “Notwithstanding My Weakness,” *Ensign*, November 1976, 12, 14]*

With Elder Maxwell, I testify that God's grace is sufficient. Jesus' grace is sufficient. It is enough. It is all we need. Oh, young people, don't quit. Keep trying. Don't look for escapes and excuses. Look for the Lord and His perfect strength. Don't search for someone to blame. Search for someone to help you. Seek Christ, and, as you do, I promise you will feel the enabling power we call His amazing grace. I leave this testimony and all of my love—for I do love you. As God is my witness, I love the youth of this church. I believe in you. I'm pulling for you. And I'm not the only one. Parents are pulling for you, leaders are pulling for you, and prophets are pulling for you. And Jesus is pulling *with* you. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.