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Christ and the Three Pillars of Eternity

JARED T. PARKER

The plan of salvation is the “fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ”¹ and is the means by which God accomplishes His purposes “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Elder Bruce R. McConkie identified the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement as the “three pillars of eternity”² and taught that understanding them lays the foundation for understanding the entire plan of salvation.³

God himself . . . ordained and established a plan of salvation whereby his spirit children might advance and progress and become like him. It is the gospel of God, the plan of Eternal Elohim, the system that saves and exalts, and it consists of three things. *These three are the very pillars of eternity itself.* They are the most important events that ever have or will occur in all eternity. They are the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement.

. . . We must know how and in what manner these three eternal verities—the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement—are inseparably woven together to form one plan of salvation. No one of them stands alone; each of them ties into the other two; and without a knowledge of all of them, it is not possible to know the truth about any one of them.⁴

Therefore, if we do not understand what God has revealed about the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement, we do not yet have a complete understanding of the plan of salvation.

To understand the plan of salvation, we will consider the temporal and spiritual aspects of the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement as they relate to the earth and all life on it, Adam and Eve,

and each of us as individuals. As we understand the temporal and spiritual purposes of the plan of salvation, we will better appreciate the relationship between Christ and the three pillars of eternity.

THE CREATION

God is the Creator. To create is to organize.⁵ Under the direction of His Father, Christ created “all things” (John 1:3). Although God has created millions and millions of worlds (see Moses 7:30), we only have a record of the creation of this earth (see Moses 1:35, 37–40). Even so, the principles that pertain to the creation of this world and its inhabitants likely apply to all similar worlds and their inhabitants.

Spiritual Creation. God created all things spiritually before creating them physically (see Moses 3:5). We do not know very much about the spirit creation of the earth because we do not have a detailed scriptural record of it.⁶ However, we know that “all spirit is matter” (D&C 131:7) and that the matter or material that makes up spirit entities is intelligence, also called spirit element.⁷ This substance is coeternal with God (see D&C 93:29).⁸ We also understand that spirit entities, whether people or things, appear the same in spirit form as the physical form they have in mortality (see D&C 77:1). Thus, the earth and all plant and animal life on it were first created as spirit entities from intelligence.

What about the spirit creation of Adam and Eve and of all mankind? God “created all the children of men . . . in heaven” before there was “flesh upon the earth” (Moses 3:5). Abraham saw the “intelligences that were organized before the world was” when “God . . . stood among those that were spirits” (Abraham 3:22–23). Adam and Eve were created as spirits the same as every other spirit child of Heavenly Father. Through the spirit-birth process, intelligence (spirit element) was organized into a spirit body.⁹ Spirit birth constitutes the spirit creation of all of God’s children.

Physical Creation. Scriptural statements about the creation of the earth describe its physical creation.¹⁰ The Bible does not give a specific reason why God explained the physical creation to Moses, but

latter-day revelation does. After discerning all the particles of this earth, Moses asked how the Lord had made the things Moses had been shown (see Moses 1:30). The Lord answered by revealing the physical creation as found in Moses chapters 2 and 3. In addition, we have Abraham's account of the physical creation in Abraham chapters 4 and 5.

The accounts of the physical creation of the earth also contain the Lord's explanation of the physical creation of Adam and Eve¹¹ and of all mankind: "And I, the Lord God, formed man from the dust of the ground" (Moses 3:7; see also Abraham 5:7). To be formed from the dust of the ground means to be born. God indicated this when He told Adam to teach his children that "inasmuch as *ye were born into the world* by water, and blood, and the spirit, which I have made, and *so became of dust a living soul*, even so ye must be born again" (Moses 6:59; emphasis added). Knowing this, we can better understand the official statement by the First Presidency entitled "The Origin of Man":

Adam, our progenitor, "the first man," was, like Christ, a pre-existent spirit, and like Christ he took upon him an appropriate body, the body of a man, and so became a "living soul." . . .

It is held by some that Adam was not the first man upon this earth, and that the original human being was a development from lower orders of the animal creation. These, however, are the theories of men. The word of the Lord declares that Adam was "the first man of all men" (Moses 1:34), and we are therefore in duty bound to regard him as the primal parent of our race. . . . Man began life as a human being, in the likeness of our heavenly Father. . . .

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, basing its belief on divine revelation, ancient and modern, proclaims man to be the direct and lineal offspring of Deity.¹²

Just as intelligence (spirit element) is organized into a spirit body through the spirit-birth process, through the physical-birth process the dust of the earth (physical element) is organized into a physical body.¹³ Physical birth constitutes the physical creation of all of God's children.¹⁴

THE FALL

God ordained the Fall. To fall is to go downward or forward or both.¹⁵ God created the earth, all life on it, and Adam and Eve so that they would fall. The Fall was just as necessary for eternal progression as was the Creation. Without the Fall, the designs of God would have been frustrated because there would have been no mortality (see 2 Nephi 2:22–23) and thus no birth, no death,¹⁶ no resurrection, and no eternal life. “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25) through the Atonement.

The Fall is both general and individual. The general Fall is called the Fall of Adam¹⁷ and is “one of the most important occurrences in the history of man.”¹⁸ Adam’s Fall brought spiritual and temporal death into the world (see Alma 42:7–9). These two types of death brought by Adam’s Fall affect all things, including the earth and the plants and animals on it as well as all of Adam’s posterity. In addition to Adam’s Fall, we must consider our own individual fall.¹⁹ This personal fall seems to be both spiritual and temporal, just like Adam’s Fall was. Each mortal’s personal fall consists of his or her own individual sins (spiritual fall) and mortal flesh (temporal fall). This distinction is extremely important. To correctly understand the Atonement, we must first correctly understand the Fall. If we can understand the difference between how Adam’s Fall and our own personal fall affect us, we will be able to understand how the Atonement ransoms man from the Fall.

Spiritual Death. Death is separation. Spiritual death is “separation from God and his influences.”²⁰ After Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, the earth and all life on it fell and experienced spiritual death by becoming mortal.²¹ As Adam was cast out of God’s presence (see D&C 29:40–41), so likewise all his posterity are born into a fallen environment where they are no longer in God’s presence. We experience spiritual death because of Adam’s Fall, through no fault of our own.

There is another spiritual death, which comes upon mankind because of individual sin, meaning intentional disobedience to divine law.²² Like the spiritual fall we inherit from Adam, this personal spiritual fall will keep us from being able to live in God’s presence. The

Lord explained that some will be raised unto “eternal damnation” because they “cannot be redeemed from *their spiritual fall*” (D&C 29:44; emphasis added). We must be redeemed from both Adam’s spiritual fall and our own spiritual fall through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Temporal Death. Since death is separation, temporal death is the temporary separation of body and spirit. This is true of mankind, plants, animals, and the earth itself. All of these have spirit bodies and physical bodies that separate at death (see Moses 3:5–9; D&C 88:26).²³ Because of the Fall, all things that were created will die.²⁴

Each of us inherited the physical changes that came upon Adam’s body when he fell. Our mortal flesh is weak and imperfect because it is subject to sickness and pain, as well as to its desires and appetites. “The flesh is often spoken of as being a part of our mortal or fallen nature . . . as opposed to the Spirit . . . and as needing to be overcome.”²⁵ It is not our fault that our bodies have inherent desires and appetites. However, we become “carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature” (Alma 42:10; see also Moses 5:13) as we choose to improperly gratify the desires of the flesh. The “natural man” (Mosiah 3:19) is someone “who chooses to be influenced by the passions, desires, appetites, and senses of the flesh rather than by the promptings of the Holy Spirit.”²⁶ Thus “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other” (Galatians 5:17).²⁷ Our mortal flesh represents our personal temporal fall, and we are accountable for overcoming such desires and appetites. We must be redeemed from both Adam’s temporal fall and our own temporal fall through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

THE ATONEMENT

God atones for His creations. To atone is to “suffer the penalty” for the violation of divine law, bringing reconciliation with God.²⁸ Through the Atonement Christ overcame death, making this “the most important event that has ever occurred in the history of mankind.”²⁹ The Atonement is the solution to the Fall, both generally and individually. Christ suffered for the spiritual and temporal

deaths brought by Adam's Fall and all the individual sins and imperfections of His people. Adam brought about temporal and spiritual death; Christ brought about immortality and eternal life.³⁰

Amulek explained that "there should be a great and last sacrifice . . . an infinite and eternal sacrifice" (Alma 34:10).³¹ Nothing would suffice except the sacrifice of a God. During the Atonement for our sins, the Savior suffered pain and anguish equal to the combined suffering of all mankind (see 2 Nephi 9:21; D&C 18:11).³² This caused Him "to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit" (D&C 19:18). Thus Christ could ascend "into heaven, having the bowels of mercy . . . standing betwixt [us] and justice" (Mosiah 15:9) and be our Advocate before the Father (see D&C 45:3–4).

Through the Atonement, God brings about His great and eternal purposes—"the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). We better appreciate the breadth of the Atonement as we consider its premortal, mortal, and eternal effects. "They who keep their first estate shall be added upon . . . and they who keep their second estate shall have glory added upon their heads for ever and ever" (Abraham 3:26). The reward for keeping one's first estate (premortally faithful) is mortality and therefore immortality. The reward for keeping one's second estate (mortally faithful) is eternal life.³³ This is the plan designed for the happiness of man.³⁴

Immortality. Christ was the first to rise in immortality (see Acts 26:23; Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5; 2 Nephi 2:8), and because of His resurrection, all creation will be resurrected. Resurrection is the reuniting of the spirit body with the physical body after death.³⁵ All things were created, all things fell, and all things will be resurrected.³⁶ Through resurrection, the earth and all life on it will unconditionally overcome the temporal and spiritual deaths brought by Adam's Fall.³⁷

All mankind will be resurrected and automatically redeemed from temporal death. In addition, the Resurrection unconditionally redeems all mankind from the spiritual death brought by Adam's Fall. This is because all mankind will be brought back into God's presence to be judged. Samuel the Lamanite taught that "the resur-

rection of Christ redeemeth mankind, yea, even all mankind, and bringeth them back into the presence of the Lord” (Helaman 14:17).³⁸ Paul’s statement “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22)³⁹ is true of *both* the temporal and spiritual deaths brought by Adam’s Fall.⁴⁰

Eternal life. Eternal life is the type of life God lives, and those who gain eternal life will “live forever as families in God’s presence (D&C 132:19–20, 24, 55).”⁴¹ Eternal life is the greatest of all of the gifts of God (see D&C 14:7) and the condition for accountable persons to inherit this gift is “obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” (Articles of Faith 1:3), meaning that we must keep the commandments.⁴² More specifically, we must have faith in Jesus Christ, repent of our sins, and receive all necessary priesthood ordinances (see Articles of Faith 1:4). As we do these things, we overcome our sins (personal spiritual fall) and our mortal flesh (personal temporal fall) by the grace of Jesus Christ through justification and sanctification. If we “press forward” on this path and “endure to the end,” the time will come when the Father will say to us, “Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Nephi 31:20).

Justification is “to be pardoned from punishment for sin and declared guiltless. A person is justified by the Savior’s grace through faith in him. This faith is shown by repentance and obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.”⁴³ Since “by the law no flesh is justified” (2 Nephi 2:5), we must “exercise [our] faith unto repentance” (Alma 34:17) to be justified by Jesus Christ⁴⁴ or we cannot inherit eternal life. Repentance “is not optional for salvation,”⁴⁵ and so God Himself, as well as His servants, repeatedly calls us to repentance.⁴⁶ For us, “all we can do” (2 Nephi 25:23) is “repent sufficiently” (Alma 24:11) so that God’s grace will save us.⁴⁷ Indeed, the plan of redemption is really the plan of repentance (see Alma 12:33–34). True faith in Jesus Christ, manifested by obedience and repentance, saves us from our sins (personal spiritual fall) by justification through His grace because of the Atonement. Truly, “we know that justification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true” (D&C 20:30).

Sanctification is “the process of becoming free from sin, pure, clean, and holy through the atonement of Jesus Christ (Moses 6:59–60).”⁴⁸ Sanctification complements justification because the desires, appetites, and passions of the natural man persist in a repentant person.⁴⁹ Though people may be declared righteous by justification, their natures are not automatically changed. Justification is about our past while sanctification is about our future.⁵⁰ We can overcome the imperfections of our mortal flesh by sanctification through reception of the Holy Ghost (see 3 Nephi 27:20). To put off the “natural man” we yield “to the enticings of the Holy Spirit” and thereby become saints (holy ones) “through the atonement of Christ” (Mosiah 3:19). We qualify ourselves for the companionship of the Holy Ghost and its gifts by our efforts to love God⁵¹ and keep His commandments (see D&C 20:77; 46:9). Those who press forward in obedience experience “the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts . . . because of their yielding their hearts unto God” (Helaman 3:35).⁵² As the Spirit causes “a mighty change in us, or in our hearts” we will “have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2).⁵³ This is what it means to truly be “born again.”⁵⁴ By this process, the Lord promises that the weakness of our mortal flesh will become strong through His grace (see Ether 12:27).⁵⁵ This will be because we “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1) so that the “lust of the flesh” is governed by the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16, 22).⁵⁶ True faith in Jesus Christ, manifested by obedience and reception of the Spirit, saves us from our mortal flesh (personal temporal fall) by sanctification through His grace because of the Atonement.⁵⁷ Truly, “we know also, that sanctification through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is just and true, to all those who love and serve God with all their might, minds, and strength” (D&C 20:31).

CHRIST

Christ’s role is central in the plan of salvation. Christ, the only sinless and perfect Son of God, put the Father’s plan into action by His atoning sacrifice. He is the only one who could rescue us from

death and sin and thus become the Mediator between us and the broken law. Mormon said that Christ claimed of the Father His “rights of mercy” because He “answered the ends of the law” (Moroni 7:27–28). What are the ends of the law? The prophet Lehi explained, “Men are instructed sufficiently that they know good from evil. And the law is given unto men. And by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. Yea, by the temporal law they were cut off; and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever” (2 Nephi 2:5). From this we learn that a law is given unto men that cuts them off both temporally and spiritually. Therefore, it appears that the ends of the law are *temporal and spiritual death*, also referred to by Lehi as the “punishment which is affixed.” “Wherefore, the ends of the law which the Holy One hath given, unto the inflicting of the punishment which is affixed, which punishment that is affixed is in opposition to that of the happiness which is affixed, to answer the ends of the atonement—For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:10–11).⁵⁸ Not only do the “ends of the law” exist unto the inflicting of an affixed punishment, but the “ends of the atonement” exist unto the granting of an affixed happiness. These two things are set in opposition to each other, so one does not exist without the other. If the ends of the law are temporal and spiritual death, then the ends of the Atonement are temporal and spiritual life. In other words, the ends of the Atonement are *immortality and eternal life*. This then would be the affixed happiness set in opposition to the affixed punishment.

If the ends of the law are temporal and spiritual death, we can propose an explanation for how Christ’s “sacrifice for sin” (2 Nephi 2:7) answered the ends of the law. He lived the whole law without sin or imperfection and then took upon Himself all the effects of the broken law. He experienced temporal and spiritual death in our place, including both the temporal and spiritual aspects of Adam’s Fall and our own personal falls. As the Fall is both general and individual, the Atonement is also both general and individual. When Christ suffered in Gethsemane, He took upon Himself all of our individual sins and imperfections and thereby overcame the personal fall of all of God’s

children. However, even enduring this incredible agony was not enough because the ransom also had to be paid for the effects of Adam's fall on all creation. It seems that this was accomplished on the cross of Calvary when Christ experienced both spiritual and temporal death. Apparently the Father completely withdrew Himself from the Savior,⁵⁹ causing Him to exclaim, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Completely separated from God and thus suffering spiritual death, Christ also experienced temporal death. At that triumphant moment He cried aloud, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Christ suffered and overcame the temporal and spiritual death brought by Adam's Fall and the individual sins and imperfections of His people. Thus, by overcoming sin and death Christ answered the ends of the law.⁶⁰

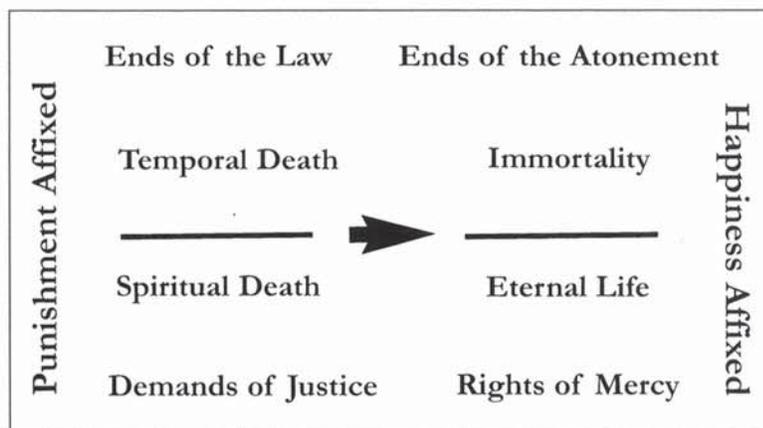


Figure 1. An interpretation of the ends of the law and the ends of the Atonement.

The ends of the law and the ends of the Atonement are manifestations of the justice and the mercy of God (see Figure 1). Justice is "an eternal law that requires a penalty each time a law of God is broken (Alma 42:13–24)."⁶¹ Alma explained that because of Adam's transgression "all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence" (Alma 42:14). Without the Atonement, justice demands that all mankind remain temporally

and spiritually dead forever (see 2 Nephi 9:7–9). However, with the Atonement, mercy can satisfy the punishment demanded by justice and grant blessings to the repentant. “God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also” (Alma 42:15). God appeases the demands of justice by answering the ends of the law so that the justice of the ends of the law and the mercy of the ends of the Atonement can both be completely satisfied. “And thus God bringeth about his great and eternal purposes, which were prepared from the foundation of the world” (Alma 42:26; see also Alma 34:14–16).

Having analyzed the plan of salvation, we can now see more clearly Christ’s role in relation to the three pillars of eternity:

1. Christ is the Creator. Under His Father’s direction, He created this and millions of other worlds.

2. Christ is our Redeemer from death. Adam’s Fall brought spiritual and temporal death upon all men. Christ’s Resurrection unconditionally redeems all mankind from the temporal and spiritual death brought by Adam’s Fall. The reward for keeping our first estate (pre-mortal faithfulness) is immortality.

3. Christ is our Savior from sin. We have imperfections and sins we cannot overcome by ourselves. Christ’s sufferings save us from our imperfections (temporal flesh) and our sins (spiritual death) on conditions of our faith and repentance. The reward for keeping our second estate (mortal faithfulness) is eternal life. Christ and the plan of salvation really do bring about the immortality and eternal life of man!

CONCLUSION

The three pillars of eternity—the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement—are critical parts of the plan of salvation. The plan’s central figure is Christ, who since premortality, during mortality, and throughout all eternity, seeks to redeem and save all His creations. With new insight, we appreciate the content and sequence of Moroni’s teachings concerning these truths.

But behold, I will show unto you a God of miracles, even the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and it is that same God who created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are.

Behold, he created Adam, and by Adam came the fall of man. And because of the fall of man came Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son; and because of Jesus Christ came the redemption of man.

And because of the redemption of man, which came by Jesus Christ, they are brought back into the presence of the Lord; yea, this is wherein all men are redeemed, because the death of Christ bringeth to pass the resurrection, which bringeth to pass a redemption from an endless sleep, from which sleep all men shall be awakened by the power of God when the trump shall sound; and they shall come forth, both small and great, and all shall stand before his bar, being redeemed and loosed from this eternal band of death, which death is a temporal death.

And then cometh the judgment of the Holy One upon them; and then cometh the time that he that is filthy shall be filthy still; and he that is righteous shall be righteous still; he that is happy shall be happy still; and he that is unhappy shall be unhappy still. (Mormon 9:11–14; see also D&C 20:17–26)

As we understand the plan of salvation, we better understand our need for Jesus Christ and we desire to follow Him to salvation.⁶² If we do our part, the Savior will accomplish His purposes to one day crown us with “immortality, and eternal life” (D&C 75:5).

NOTES

1. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Guide to the Scriptures,” *The Scriptures: CD-ROM Standard Edition 1.0* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), “Plan of Redemption” or <http://scriptures.lds.org/gs/contents>.

2. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Three Pillars of Eternity,” *Brigham Young University 1981 Fireside and Devotional Speeches* (Provo, Utah: University Publications, 1981), 27.

3. The prophet Alma gave us an important insight into God’s dealings with His children when he said, “God gave unto them commandments, *after* having made known unto them the plan of redemption” (Alma 12:32;

emphasis added). God wants His children to first understand the plan of salvation and then keep the commandments. The order is important. Our motivation for living gospel standards will improve if we comprehend the doctrine of the overall plan. See Elder Boyd K. Packer's message given during an All-Church Coordinating Council Meeting (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 18 May 1993) where he used Alma 12:32 as his text; see also his address to Church educators: "The Great Plan of Happiness," Church Educational System Symposium, August 1993.

4. Bruce R. McConkie, "Christ and the Creation," *Ensign*, June 1982, 9; emphasis added.

5. See *Guide to the Scriptures*, "Create, Creation."

6. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 1:75–76.

7. See for instance Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 11.

8. See Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 352–54.

9. Accordingly, exalted couples are promised "a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever" (D&C 132:19) meaning that they will have spirit children born to them after the Resurrection.

10. See Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:75–76.

11. The account that speaks of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib or side is figurative (see McConkie, "Christ and the Creation," 15).

12. James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–75), 4:205–6. This is an excerpt from the complete statement found on pages 199–206. For more scriptural information relative to this important subject see Moses 4:25; 6:22; and Luke 3:38. In addition, see the following selection of statements: Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man, His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 344–45; Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854–1886), 7:286; Heber C. Kimball, *Journal of Discourses*, 6:31; Joseph F. Smith, "The Creation of Man," in *1910 Course of Study for Priests*, cited in *Church News*, 19 September 1936, 8; Joseph F. Smith, *Deseret Evening News*, 27 December 1913, Section 111, 7; Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 55–56; Marion G. Romney, Conference Report, April 1953, 123–24; Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 209; and Spencer W. Kimball, "The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood," *Ensign*, March 1976, 72.

13. Also note Job 34:15; Ecclesiastes 3:20; 12:7; Mosiah 2:25–26.

14. There is a distinction here because Adam and Eve were “created in a nonmortal condition” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Bible Dictionary [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979], “Flesh,” 675–76) while the rest of mankind is created in a mortal condition.

15. See McConkie, “The Three Pillars of Eternity,” 5; and Bruce R. McConkie, *Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie*, ed. Mark L. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 179.

16. “The Fall brought mortality and death to the earth (2 Ne. 2:22; Moses 6:48)” (Guide to the Scriptures, “Death, Physical”). “Latter-day revelation teaches that there was no death on this earth for any forms of life before the fall of Adam. Indeed, death entered the world as a direct result of the fall (2 Ne. 2:22; Moses 6:48)” (Bible Dictionary, “Death,” 655).

17. When the scriptures refer to the Fall, they consistently say that Satan “beguiled our first parents” (2 Nephi 9:9; see also Mosiah 16:3; Ether 8:25). Even so, it appears that Eve was deceived when she partook of the forbidden fruit, but Adam was not (see 1 Timothy 2:14; Moses 4:19).

18. Bible Dictionary, “Fall of Adam,” 670.

19. An explanation of the spiritual aspect of “our own fall” is found in Gerald N. Lund, “The Fall of Man and His Redemption,” *Ensign*, January 1990, 22–27.

20. Guide to the Scriptures, “Death, Spiritual.” The term “spiritual death” has different uses in the scriptures, describing different states of people in either time or eternity (see McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 756–59). However, in each case, it means separation from God to some degree.

21. “Before the fall, Adam and Eve had physical bodies but no blood. There was no sin, no death, and no children among any of the earthly creations. . . . After Adam fell, the whole creation fell and became mortal” (Bible Dictionary, “Fall of Adam,” 670). Mortality is a telestial condition. The prefix *tele* suggests that something exists by operating at a distance from something else (such as *telegraph*, *telephone*, *television*).

22. See Guide to the Scriptures, “Sin.”

23. Also consider Bible Dictionary, “Spirit,” 776.

24. Even so, death is a necessary and indispensable part of the plan of happiness. Without death nothing would ever be resurrected. Resurrection comes because of death and death comes because of the Fall. So in truth, the Resurrection comes because of the Fall. “For as death hath passed upon all men, to fulfill the merciful plan of the great Creator, there must needs be a power of resurrection, and *the resurrection must needs come unto man by reason of the Fall*” (2 Nephi 9:6; emphasis added).

25. Bible Dictionary, "Flesh," 675. Imperfections due to the weakness of our mortal flesh are related to, but different from, our sins. For instance, Nephi lamented, "O wretched man that I am! Yea, my heart sorroweth because of *my flesh*; my soul grieveth because of *mine iniquities*" (2 Nephi 4:17, emphasis added). Nephi's statement is identifying *flesh* and *iniquities* as different things.

26. Guide to the Scriptures, "Natural Man."

27. As Paul wrote elsewhere, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Romans 7:18). It is important to note that Paul was not saying the flesh is inherently evil (see Church Educational System, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus and His Apostles*, 2d ed. [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979], 324), but rather that the unrighteous desires of the flesh toward sin are evil.

28. Guide to the Scriptures, "Atone, Atonement."

29. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994), 71.

30. The Savior said, "I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25). He is immortality and eternal life and wants us to be like Him. Rephrasing Lorenzo Snow's popular couplet: As man now is, God once was; as God now is, *God wants man to be*.

31. All things in the universe center around and testify of Christ and His infinite sacrifice (see Moses 6:63). In addition, the inhabitants of all the worlds Christ has created depend on His Atonement for salvation (see D&C 76:23–24).

32. See Marion G. Romney, Conference Report, October 1969, 57 as quoted in Howard W. Hunter, *That We Might Have Joy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 123; and Ezra Taft Benson, *Come unto Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 6–7.

33. From this broad perspective, we can see that *both* immortality and eternal life are conditional upon our faithfulness. However, since all those who receive a physical body have kept their first estate, we generally speak of receiving immortality as being unconditional. This is because the conditions have already been met, not because of an absence of conditions.

34. Thus far we have considered the spiritual and then temporal aspects of the Creation and the Fall. However, to examine the redemptive power of the Atonement, the order of analysis will be reversed. God created all things first spiritually and second temporally and then God seeks to redeem all things first temporally and second spiritually (see D&C 29:31–32). Therefore, in what follows, the temporal aspects of the Atonement are considered first and the spiritual aspects are considered second.

35. See Guide to the Scriptures, “Resurrection.”

36. We suppose that all the created worlds, as well as all the plants, animals, and people on those worlds will be resurrected.

37. The Lord spoke of the resurrection of the earth when He said “it shall be sanctified; yea, notwithstanding it shall die, it shall be quickened again” (D&C 88:26). In addition, we learn that the sea of glass John the Revelator saw “is the earth, in its sanctified, immortal, and eternal state” (D&C 77:1). Joseph Smith also taught that all types of animals will be resurrected (see *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 291–92). Not only will the earth, the plants, and the animals be resurrected and automatically overcome physical death, but they will also automatically overcome spiritual death. This will occur because God will dwell on this celestial earth (see D&C 88:18–19).

38. We remember that God forgave Adam his transgression in the Garden of Eden (see Moses 6:53) and that “men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam’s transgression” (Articles of Faith 1:2). Therefore, we do not need to do anything to overcome the spiritual death we inherited from Adam’s Fall. See an explanation of this in Church Educational System, *Book of Mormon Student Manual: Religion 121 and 122* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 29.

39. See Bible Dictionary, “Death,” 655. With a correct understanding of the extensive power of the Resurrection, we can see that Christ’s resurrection unconditionally redeems all men from Adam’s Fall, while His suffering conditionally saves men from their sins if they repent. This is what the Savior taught when He went to the spirit world and “preached to them the everlasting gospel, the doctrine of the resurrection and the redemption of mankind from the fall, and from individual sins on conditions of repentance” (D&C 138:19).

40. As Jacob said, “O how great the plan of our God!” (2 Nephi 9:13). We are born into a fallen environment full of opposites so that we can progress, yet we are accountable only for our own choices. Since men “are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever . . . free to choose liberty and eternal life . . . or to choose captivity and death” (2 Nephi 2:26–27). The Resurrection frees us from accountability for the effects of Adam’s Fall, allowing us to choose for ourselves. Therefore, agency is a gift that comes to us because of the Atonement.

41. Guide to the Scriptures, “Eternal Life.”

42. The scriptures speak so often of the importance of keeping the commandments that it would be impossible to list all of the references. However, the Savior summarized this when He said, “And after that you

have received this, if you keep not my commandments you cannot be saved in the kingdom of my Father” (D&C 18:46).

43. Guide to the Scriptures, “Justification, Justify.”

44. We read that the Savior will “justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (Mosiah 14:11; Isaiah 53:11).

45. Bible Dictionary, “Repentance,” 761.

46. The Savior said, “I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me” (3 Nephi 11:32). In our day He has explained the connection between the purpose of the Atonement and our opportunity for repentance: “For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance” (D&C 18:11–12).

47. I appreciate Dr. Stephen E. Robinson, professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, for showing me the connection between these verses. It may be that Alma 24:11–15 is intended as an interpretation of 2 Nephi 25:23.

48. Guide to the Scriptures, “Sanctification.”

49. See Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 10:173 as cited in Church Educational System, *Doctrine and Covenants Student Manual: Religion 324–325* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 41.

50. Idea taken from Stephen E. Robinson, “What Are Justification, Sanctification, and Grace?” (unpublished manuscript, 19 March 1993), 5.

51. Alma understood the relationship between mortal appetites and passions and our ability to love when he counseled his son, “Bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled with love” (Alma 38:12).

52. The heart is “a symbol of the mind and will of man and the figurative source of all emotions and feelings” (Guide to the Scriptures, “Heart”). Therefore, yielding our heart to God is the submission of our will, including the will of the flesh (see 2 Nephi 10:24), to the will of the Father. “The submission of one’s will is really the only uniquely personal thing we have to place on God’s altar” (Neal A. Maxwell, “Swallowed Up in the Will of the Father,” *Ensign*, November 1995, 24). By doing so we are following Christ’s example because He “subjected the flesh to the will of the Father” meaning that “the flesh [became] subject to the Spirit” and “the will of the Son [was] swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 15:2, 5, 7).

53. Such people, “after being sanctified by the Holy Ghost” cannot “look upon sin save it [be] with abhorrence” (Alma 13:12). These sanctified

souls are becoming like God because He also “cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance” (D&C 1:31).

54. See Guide to the Scriptures, “Born Again, Born of God.”

55. For an insightful explanation of how the Holy Spirit affects our natural tendencies, see Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (Kila, Mont.: Kessinger, 1998), 100–1.

56. Perhaps this adds meaning to the promise that faithful priesthood holders will be “sanctified by the Spirit unto the renewing of their bodies” (D&C 84:33). This may be the beginning of what happened to the Nephite disciples when “there was a change wrought upon them . . . and they were sanctified in the flesh, that they were holy” so that “Satan could have no power over them” (3 Nephi 28:39).

57. Thus we are “perfect in Christ” (Moroni 10:33) in this life so that we can eventually be “made perfect” (D&C 76:69) like our “Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48; see also 3 Nephi 12:48).

58. This is the only place in the standard works that contains the phrase “the ends of the atonement.”

59. See Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:205–6; James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983), 612; and Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 530.

60. We can now better understand the symbolism of the law of sacrifice and the ordinance of the sacrament. Under the law of sacrifice, the firstfruits of the field (see Exodus 34:26; Leviticus 23:9–20) and the firstlings of the flock (see Moses 5:5) were offered to God. Christ was the first to rise in the Resurrection (see Acts 26:23; Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5; 2 Nephi 2:8) thereby becoming the “firstfruits unto God” (2 Nephi 2:9). Thus, the offering of the firstfruits of the field pointed to the Resurrection. Christ was also the Firstborn “Lamb of God” (John 1:29), typified by the offering of the firstlings of the flock (see Moses 5:7). Since Christ gave His life that we might live forever with God, the sacrifice of the firstlings of the flock pointed to eternal life. This same symbolism is found in the ordinance of the sacrament. The bread reminds us of Christ’s body, the “bread of life” (John 6:35, 48), especially His resurrected body (see 3 Nephi 18:7). Bread is made from wheat and the Savior likened the need for His death to bring about the Resurrection to the need for a kernel of wheat to die and be placed in the ground so it can bring forth “much fruit” (John 12:24). The bread of the sacrament reminds us that because of Christ’s resurrection, all will overcome the temporal and spiritual death brought by Adam’s Fall. The water reminds us of His blood shed in Gethsemane. There He suffered the penalty of our sins and took upon

Himself all of our imperfections. The water reminds us that through Christ's blood, the faithful and repentant soul may inherit eternal life.

61. Guide to the Scriptures, "Justice."

62. With a greater understanding of the plan of salvation we can live the gospel better and share it more effectively with others. We can teach the plan, the three pillars of eternity, to others as the great missionaries Ammon and Aaron did (see Alma 18:36–40; 22:12–14).