



‘Repentance: A Fresh View of God’

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Thank you, Dr. Brown, and thank you all for all being here. We understand that you are coming to the end of the school year, and this is the last of the devotionals. We are grateful you are here. I thank Margot Butler and the beautiful choir and above all, my secretary, Diana Torres, who offered the opening prayer. When we presided over the South America North Area, Diana was my wonderful secretary and it is so nice to be with you again. My, how your English has improved, Diana. The college has had a great impact on you.

Do You Know How to Repent?

I have been working on an idea for a number of years, and today I would like to present it to you the best I know how. I do not have a printed text yet. I just want to share some ideas that I believe I personally need to apply, and hopefully they would be helpful to you. It grows out of an experience I had twenty years ago when I was being interviewed by my bishop for my temple recommend. Because I was a member of a stake presidency, I knew all the temple recommend interview questions. I asked them weekly to other members, and I was prepared to answer each question that my bishop asked me.

But he caught me totally off guard with one question not found in the temple recommend book. He asked, “Jay, do you know how to repent?” My first thought was to say, “Yes, of course I know how to repent. After all, I am a seminary teacher. I have taught this doctrine many times.” I paused for a moment to think about it, and the more I thought about it, the more uncertain I was of my answer. The standard five or six R’s of repentance (some commonly taught “R’s” of repentance are recognition, remorse, restitution, reformation, resolution, etc.) did not seem adequate. In fact, they were meaningless to me at that time. They seemed to be too trite, too compartmentalized. I know there are some great doctrines and principles in those R’s of repentance, but I did not feel comfortable in giving an immediate answer nor using

them in my answer. Finally I said rather hesitatingly, “Yes bishop. I think I do.”

I do not remember any other details of the interview because I was so struck with that one question. “Jay, do you know how to repent?” Since then I have thought a lot about that question and the associated doctrine. You may remember that in President Hinckley’s first message to us as the President of the Church, he encouraged all of us to be better and to do better, meaning we can and should repent.

Repentance is not a topic with which we always feel comfortable. We seem to think it is for the other person. I will never forget a wonderful member of a stake presidency with whom I served who said, “Any time you point a finger towards someone in a critical or accusing way, look at the other three fingers pointing toward you and ask ‘who need it the most?’ Three fingers towards me and one towards the other person. I must start here and now with me.” So I am giving myself a talk today, and if it helps you, my purpose for coming will be accomplished.

Elder Holland made a very insightful comment about repentance at general conference a couple of years ago. He said, “Someone once said that repentance is the first pressure we feel when drawn to the bosom of the Father.” (Elder Jeffrey R. Holland Conference Report, November 1996, p. 83) I want to repeat it. “Someone once said that repentance is the first pressure we feel when drawn to the bosom of the Father.”

How do we draw ourselves to the Father so as to feel pressure or motivation, perhaps a great deal of pressure to repent? President Hinckley was tutored for so many years with a great member of the First Presidency, Stephen L. Richards. He taught this:

Members of the Church who have been taught know the seriousness of transgression, and their knowledge brings accountability and responsibility. To them repentance has special significance. On their shoulders [is] the weight of the kingdom. Its progress is retarded not so much by lack of

effort as by insufficiency of repentance— individual repentance—which is essential to make them profitable servants. (President Steven L. Richards, Conference Report, April 1956, p. 94)

You work hard to be good and to do good. I work hard. You spend long hours and long days in many good and worthwhile activities. Many of you have Church callings. Some even have two and three callings. Effort? You give much, and yet the Church seems to be on a plateau, speaking statistically and when we look at the key indicators. In fact, one or two key indicators are on a decline. But you work so hard. Is the progress of the Church, as President Richards indicated, retarded not so much by lack of effort as by insufficiency of repentance? Where can I improve? What can I do better? What excess luggage or baggage do I need to get out of my life?

The Power of Repentance and the Atonement

Some years ago I worked in the Missionary Department of the Church. We were developing materials to help missionaries be better and do better. The following experience about repentance was shared with us by one of the General Authorities:

A little over a year ago, I had the privilege of interviewing a young man to go on a mission. Because he had committed a major transgression, it was necessary of him to be interviewed by a General Authority.

When the young man came in, I said, “Apparently there’s been a major transgression in your life, and that has necessitated this interview. Would you mind telling me what the problem was? What did you do?”

He laughed and said, “Well, there isn’t anything I haven’t done.”

I said, “Well, let’s be more specific the. Have you...?”

And then this General Authority began to probe with some very specific questions.

The young man laughed again and said, “I told you, I’ve done everything.”

I said, “How many times have you...?”

He said very sarcastically, “Do you think I numbered them?”

I said, “I would to God you could if you can’t.”

He said, again quite sarcastically, “Well, I can’t.”

I said, “How about...?”

And then the General Authority probed in another direction.

He said, “I told you. I’ve done everything.”

I said, “Drugs?”

He said, “Yes,” in a very haughty attitude.

I said, “What makes you think you’re going on a mission then.”

He said, “I know I’m going. My patriarchal blessing says I’ll go on a mission and I’ve repented. I haven’t done any of

those things for this past year. I have repented, and I know I’m going on a mission.”

I said, “My dear friend, I’m sorry but you are not going on a mission. Do you think we could send you out with those clean, wholesome young men who have never violated the code? Do you think we could have you go out and boast and brag about your past? You haven’t repented; you’ve just stopped doing something. Sometime in your life you need to visit Gethsemane; and when you’ve been there, you’ll understand what repentance is. Only after you’ve suffered in some small degree as the Savior suffered in Gethsemane will you know what repentance is. The Savior suffered in a way none of us understands for every transgression committed. How dare you laugh and jest and have a haughty attitude about your repentance? I’m sorry, you are not going on a mission.”

He started to cry, and he cried for several minutes. I didn’t say a word.

Finally, he said, “I guess that’s the first time I have cried since I was five years old.”

I said, “If you had cried like that the first time you were tempted to violate the moral code, you possibly would be going on a mission.”

He left the office, and I think he felt I was really cruel. I explained to the bishop and the stake president that the boy could not go on a mission. I said, “I question that he should even have been ordained an elder. In fact, it seems to me that he should have been tried [by a disciplinary council] for his membership in the Church.”

About six months later the same General Authority returned to that city to speak in a lecture series held in the evening. When he finished, many young adults lined up to come down and shake hands with him. As he shook hands one by one, he looked up and saw the young man that he had previously interviewed standing in the line about four back.

The General Authority relates the following:

My mind quickly flashed back to our interview. I recalled his laughing and haughty attitude. I remembered how sarcastic he was. Pretty soon he was right in front of me. I was on the stand bending over, and as I reached down to shake his hand, I noticed a great change had taken place. He had tears in his eyes. He had almost a holy glow about his countenance.

He took my hand in his and said, “I’ve been there; I’ve been to Gethsemane and back.”

I said, “I know. It shows in your face.”

We can be forgiven for our transgressions, but we must understand that just to stop doing something is not repentance. It is had not been for the Savior and the miracle of forgiveness, this young man would have carried his transgressions throughout all eternity. We ought to love the Savior and serve him for this reason and this reason alone. (Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone, Sweden Area Conference, Youth Session, August 1974)

Repentance is among the very first commandments given in mortality. In the Pearl of Great Price, we note that an angel asked Adam: “*Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord? And Adam said unto him: I know not, say the Lord commanded me.*” The very first thing that the angel then taught Adam and Eve was “*Thou shalt do all that thou doest in the name of the Son, and thou shalt repent and call upon God in the name of the Son forevermore.*” (Moses 5:6-8)

In the Doctrine and Covenants, especially in the early sections, the word repentance appears frequently. In fact, of the 28 uses of the word “repentance” “repent” appears 90 times, 48 of them are in the first 66 sections. “*Declare nothing but repentance unto this generation.*” (Doctrine and Covenants 6:9)

I like the definition of the word repentance in the Bible Dictionary: “The Greek word of which this is the translation denotes a change of mind.” And then the Bible Dictionary identifies three aspects about repentance- “a fresh view about God, a fresh view about oneself, and a fresh view about the world. Since we are born into conditions of mortality, repentance comes to mean a turning of the heart and will to God, and a renunciation of sin to which we are naturally inclined.” (Bible Dictionary, p. 760)

I would like to talk briefly about those three views from a scriptural foundation—a fresh view about God, a fresh view about oneself, and a fresh view about the world.

A Fresh View About God

In the Book of Mormon when we talk about a fresh view of God, Alma related what had happened in their conversion in the wilderness. He said, “*Behold, he [God] changed their heart, he awakened them out of a deep sleep, and they awoke unto God.*” (Alma 5:7) They had a fresh view about God. There are many sleeping giants in our midst in this Church. Some of you seated here can think of a number of individuals, perhaps many, who are fast asleep spiritually and need to be awakened out of a deep sleep. The people of Alma described a new view about God, a fresh view. Sleeping giants today need this fresh view about God.

Shortly after I returned from my mission, I was assigned to be a deacon quorum advisor. In one of the lessons I taught, there was a story about a young deacon who had gone to a store. He did not have the money to buy what he wanted and so he stole it. He put it under his coat and started to walk out and was apprehended. The man who apprehended him was a member of the Church and knew him. This member of the Church asked the young deacon, “Why did you do that? You knew better.” He answered, “Well, I wanted it; I’ve always wanted it. I looked straight ahead, I looked to the right and to the left and I looked behind me. When I could see no one, I took it.” This wise advisor said “My son, you forgot to look up.” Those who do not look up to God do not have a view about God, let alone a fresh view. We are

commanded to know Him and our eternal life depends upon that knowledge (see John 17:3).

How can we pray with faith to a God we do not know? He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. The “Lectures on Faith” describe Him as having a fullness of knowledge, truth, faith or power, justice, judgement, mercy, and love. I do not understand what this means, but I am seeking and striving. Your faith will increase in Him as you increase a fresh view about Him. For example, in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul said, “*knowest thou that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*” (Romans 2:4) When we are drawn to the bosom of the Father and come to know Him better, we will feel the pressure to repent knowing about His goodness.

In King Benjamin’s discourse, we see the following:

“Behold, if the knowledge of the goodness of God at this time has awakened you to a sense of your nothingness, and your worthless and fallen state-

“I say unto you, if ye have come to a knowledge of the goodness of God, and his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering towards the children of men; and also the atonement...

“I say, that this is the man who receiveth salvation...

“*Believe in God. Believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend.*” (Mosiah 4:5-7,9, emphasis added)

As we come to know Him, we will seek to repent.

“And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them.” (Mosiah 4:10)

One of the privileges of a bishop, a stake president, and a General Authority is to see repentance in action. For us it is really seen in action when we interview candidates who were excommunicated, have repented, and been rebaptized and confirmed a member of the Church. They are recommended by their bishop and stake president to the First Presidency, and when they give approval, the General Authority conducts an interview to confirm their readiness to receive the restoration of the priesthood and the temple blessings. In those I have interviewed, I have seen true repentance. These people have been through their Gethsemane. They must go through a cleansing. To help them, they have a fresh view about God.

In the Book of Mormon, there is an example of one who gained a fresh view about God. Alma described his sinful

past as follows:

“I was struck with the great fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed...”

“I...was harrowed up to the greatest degree and racked with all my sins...”

“I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments.

“The very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror.

“Oh, thought I, that I could be banished and become extinct both soul and body, that I might not be brought to stand in the presence of my God, to be judged of my deeds.” (Alma 36: 11-15, emphasis added)

Alma obtained a fresh view about God—of his goodness, holiness, mercy, justice, and judgment.

A Fresh View About Oneself

Repentance involves a fresh view about oneself. After King Benjamin spoke to the people extensively on Christ and the Atonement, they obtained a fresh view about themselves.

They had fallen to the earth for the fear of the Lord had come upon them.

They had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying: O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

“And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words, the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of their exceeding faith in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words of King Benjamin had spoken unto them.” (Mosiah 4:1-3)

Only when we view ourselves in our carnal state and recognize our total dependance upon Christ and the Atonement will we make the necessary movement to repent.

Another illustration of a fresh view about oneself is the wonderful account of what we call “the prodigal son.” I choose to call that parable by another name. It like to call it “the parable of the two sons” because you learn as much from the second son as you do from what is called the prodigal. But when you look at the prodigal, there is a very valuable lesson about a fresh view concerning oneself.

“And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

“And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.” (Luke 15:15-16)

If you were to put the words “no man gave unto him” into our day, we might say that there would be no bishop’s orders, no government food stamps, or no social security benefits. He hit rock bottom, and what results is this one little description in verse 17, *And when he came to himself.* It is as if he sees himself in the mirror. For the first time, he sees himself as he really is and cries out, “I need help.” He said:

“I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.” (Luke 15:18).

He recognized his relationship upward and his relationship horizontally and acknowledged having sinned in two ways—against God and against man, both his Heavenly Father and his earthly father.

Alma the younger illustrated the fresh view about himself when he said:

“I was struck with such fear and amazement lest perhaps I should be destroyed,...My soul was harrowed up to their greatest degree and racked with all my sins. And now for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul.” (Alma 36:11-12,16)

A Fresh View About the World

A fresh view about the world has to do with seeing the world for what it is—a fallen, mortal world. It is a place where we come to obtain a mortal body and gain experience as we choose good over evil. This earth is described as being in a Telestial state, not a Telestial glory. Jesus referred to Satan as the prince of this world, a price of darkness. (See John 14:30 and JST John 14:30 and also D&C 127:11).

President John Taylor taught the following:

Man has lost sight of the object of his creation, and his future destiny; and losing sight of his origin, his relationship to God, and his future destiny, he has fallen into the mazes of ignorance, superstition, and iniquity, and is groping in the dark, and knows not how to conduct himself in the world, or how to prepare for the world to come. For, instead of being governed by the Spirit, Wisdom, and Revelations of God, he is governed by the spirit of the Evil one, “The god of this world, who rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience.” They have left God, and submitted themselves to his evil sway, and used that agency which God has given to them, no only in rejecting God, but in obeying Satan, and furthering his designs, which are in opposition to those of God, the happiness of mankind, and the salvation of the world. I know there are many who will ridicule this idea; but it is a thing which is plain in the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul says, *“The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”* (2 Corinthians 4) (John Taylor, The Government of God, chapter 6)

Repent And, Or..

One of the most valuable truths about repentance came from the Index of the triple combination. After the word repent, we often find the word “and,” i.e., “repent and ...” Repentance rarely stands alone. It must be coupled by something else. Repent *and* be baptized appears 25 times. Repent *and* come unto Christ is found 10 times. Repent *and* turn. Repent *and* have faith. Repent *and* believe. Repent *and* return. Repent *and* prepare. And so the list goes on. But it is not only the word “and,” it is repent “or” followed by consequences such as “be destroyed,” “not be saved,” and few others. Thus repentance does not stand alone. Other actions must accompany it.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude with a verse with profound doctrinal meaning. Samuel the Lamanite used a phrase about repentance. He came ‘upon the walls of the city, that ye might hear and know of the judgments of God which do await you because of your iniquities, and also that you might know the conditions of repentance.’ (Helaman 14:11)

Samuel repeated the phrase in verse 18:

>Yea, it [the resurrection of Christ] bringeth to pass the condition of repentance...

(Helaman 14:17-18)

The words “conditions of repentance” have great meaning I have studied and pondered the scriptures to learn what those conditions are. I have discovered that these conditions are prerequisites to the five or six “R’s” (recognition, remorse, restitution, resolution, etc.). These “R’s” are important and much needed. I have found that the following conditions need to precede the R’s”

The first condition is that God lives. He is in heaven. He knows us by name. We cannot hide from Him. He has a fullness of divine attributes and perfections. In order for repentance to begin, we must start with God and our relationship to Him.

Number two, we are fallen, mortal, unclean and we need help. We are estranged and cannot live with Him being mortal.

A third prerequisite is to know the doctrine that one day we will die. Some die early, some late. But that day will come; it is absolute.

Another prerequisite is, there will be a final judgement. An important condition of repentance is to believe that one day we will all stand before the judgment bar where Jesus says He employs no servant there (see 2 Nephi 9:41 and Mormon 3:20). That day will come.

Another prerequisite to repentance is to know that no unclean thing can dwell with God (see 1 Nephi 10:21; 15:34; Alma 7:21; 40:26; and Helaman 8:25). You can hide sins from your bishop, you can hide them from your parents and friends, but if you continue and die with unresolved sins, you are unclean and no unclean thing can dwell with God. There are no exceptions.

And the last condition I mention is that we are saved only through the merits, the mercy, and the grace of the Holy one of Israel (see 2 Nephi 2:8). He is our only hope. As we find ourselves where we are, we turn to Him. I am so grateful for the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, a message of hope. There is hope and He can make us clean.

Of all the chapters on the Atonement, Alma 7 is one of my favorites. After Alma taught about the Savior and why He suffered, he said:

“Therefore come and be baptized unto repentance, that ye may be washed from your sins, that ye may have faith on the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world, who is mighty to save and to cleanse from all unrighteousness.” (Alma 7:14).

He is mighty to save. He is mighty to cleanse. I have worked with many, including my own self, and have seen the miracle of forgiveness, the miracle of cleansing, and the I bear witness of Him, as one of His witnesses. I know that He lives. He is the Son of the Father. Jesus Christ is real and He knows us. This is His divine Church. President Gordon B. Hinckley is His authorized, legitimate spokesman, with all the keys of the kingdom surrounded by other holy prophets, seers, and revelators.

These holy scriptures are true and I bear witness of these truths about repentance and a fresh view about God. I express my love to you for your goodness. May you ever be blessed to stay on that straight and narrow path and sharpen your views about God, yourself, and the world.