

The Root of Christian Doctrine

BY THOMAS B. GRIFFITH

President Gordon B. Hinckley has taught that we must do better at getting the gospel down into our own hearts and the hearts of those we love and serve. I believe that one way to meet President Hinckley's challenge is to focus on the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

Years ago President Boyd K. Packer, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, spoke of the mercy offered by the Mediator Jesus Christ: "This is the very root of Christian doctrine.

You may know much about the gospel as it branches out from there, but if you only know the branches and those branches do not touch that

root, if they have been cut free from that truth, there will be no life nor substance nor redemption in them."¹

I offer three suggestions for how we can connect ourselves to that root and, in the process, get the gospel down into our hearts and the hearts of those we serve.



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Partake of the Emblems of His Suffering

In the temple recommend interview, we are asked, “Do you have a testimony of the Atonement of Christ and of His role as Savior and Redeemer?” In my experience as a bishop and a stake president, I can happily report that I have never had anyone answer that question other than yes. Yet I have long had a concern that we don’t fully

appreciate that question. I think it significant that of the many roles of Christ, we are asked only about His roles as

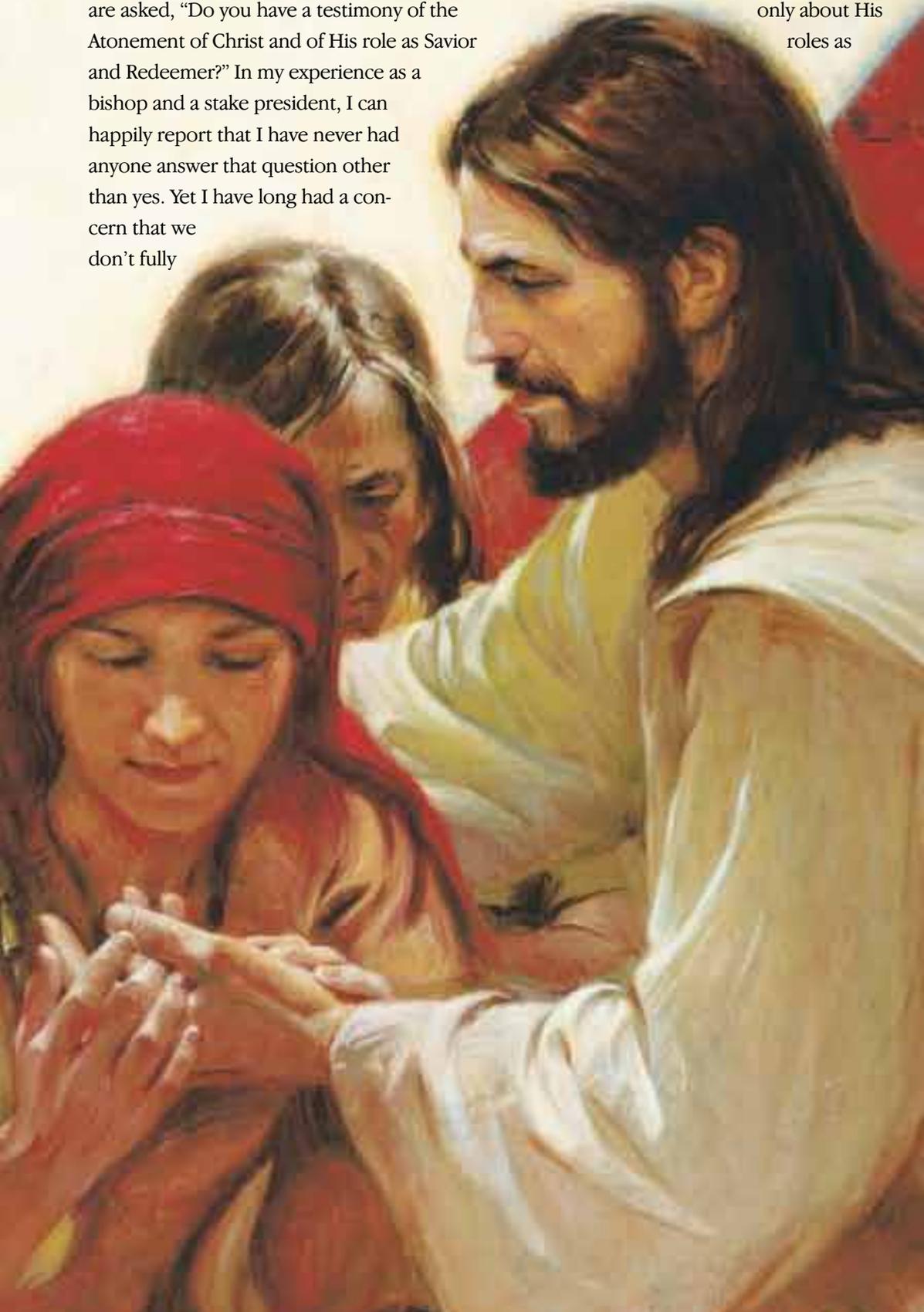


TO REMEMBER HIM ALWAYS

“It is the *wounded* Christ who is the captain of our soul—he who yet bears the scars of sacrifice, the lesions of love and humility and forgiveness.

“Those wounds are what he invites young and old, then and now, to step forward and see and feel (see 3 Ne. 11:15; 3 Ne. 18:25). Then we remember with Isaiah that it was for each of us that our Master was ‘despised and rejected . . . ; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief’ (Isa. 53:3). All this we could remember when we are invited by a kneeling young priest to remember Christ always.”

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “This Do in Remembrance of Me,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 69.



The bread and water of the sacrament are striking symbols intended to evoke in us a deep sense of gratitude and reverence for the Savior.

Savior and Redeemer. There must be something about these roles that is particularly important to the temple—a place where He binds us to Himself through covenants.

As a stake president, I worried whether the members of the stake had “a testimony of the Atonement of Christ and of His role as Savior and Redeemer.” I had the sense that most of them loved Christ—no small thing—but I worried that not enough of them knew Him as their Savior (One who had saved them)

or their Redeemer (One who had bought them). While thinking about this one day, I was reading 3 Nephi 11, and I noticed some things I never had before.

The people we read about in that chapter are the righteous remnant, those who had heeded the warnings of the prophets. They were prepared to meet the Lord. When the resurrected Lord appeared to them, He “stretched forth his hand,” showing His wound—the symbol and evidence of His sacrifice. Then He “spake unto the people, saying: Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (3 Nephi 11:9–10).

Next He said, “I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning” (3 Nephi 11:11).

That was His message. He is the Anointed One, of whom the prophets had testified. He is the Creator. He suffered for us.

Notice the people’s response: “When Jesus had spoken these words the whole multitude fell to the earth; for they remembered that it had been prophesied among them that Christ should show himself unto them” (3 Nephi 11:12).

What followed is, to me, the most sacred part of this experience. Jesus commanded them to come forward one by one and do something difficult: “Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 11:14).



These people had physical contact with these emblems of His suffering: “The multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet; and this they did do, going forth one by one until they had all gone forth” (3 Nephi 11:15)—all 2,500 of them.

Note what happened next:

“And when they had all gone forth and had witnessed for themselves, they did cry out with one accord, saying:

“Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him” (3 Nephi 11:16–17).

The second time these people fell at Jesus’s feet, they “did worship him.” The first time, they may have fallen to the ground for any number of reasons: fear, awe, peer pressure. But the second time they fell to worship Him. Why the different reaction? The second time they cried out in unison, “Hosanna!” which means “Save us now!” Why were these people crying out to Christ for salvation now?

Let me suggest a possible answer. Although they had been obedient, perhaps they had not yet come to know Him as their Savior because they had not yet felt the need to be saved. They had led lives filled with good works. They knew Jesus as God and as Exemplar. But maybe they didn’t yet know Him as Savior. Their prayer wasn’t, “We thank Thee for having saved us in the past and reminding us of that by Thy presence today.” No, the prayer was a current plea: “Hosanna!” or “Save us now!” That suggests to me that they were coming to know Him as Savior.

What had turned them from good, obedient people to good, obedient people who now knew Jesus Christ as Savior? What had caused them to fall down at His feet to worship Him? *It was physical contact with the emblems of His suffering.*

That was what the members of our stake needed so they could come to know Christ as their Savior and Redeemer: physical contact with the emblems of His suffering. But how do we make that happen? Then it occurred to me: we have that experience every Sunday when we partake of the sacrament. We eat the broken bread, a token of His slain body. We drink the water, a symbol of His spilt blood. These

are striking symbols intended to evoke in us a deep sense of gratitude and reverence.

I believe that as we participate in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, we will cry out to Christ in our hearts, “Save us now!” and we will feel to fall down to worship Him.

Ponder His Sacrifice

To get the gospel down into our hearts and the hearts of those we serve, we must also come to know in detail and with insight and feeling the events that make up the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In Doctrine and Covenants 19, the Lord gives a first-person, detailed account of the suffering He endured:

“For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; . . .

“Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink” (vv. 16, 18).

What kind of a God do we worship? A God who wants us to know that His love for us is infinite and eternal. A God who wants us to know that His love for us gave Him the strength to suffer for us. Knowing this ought to be enough to move us to submit our lives to Him in obedience and gratitude.

Some time ago I overheard a spirited discussion between two people about a work of art that contained a realistic portrayal of Christ’s suffering. One of them objected to the work and said, “I don’t want to have to think about how much Christ has suffered.” I thought that was an odd thing to say because I don’t believe that any of us has the license to avoid thinking about what He suffered, even though we can’t fully understand how much He suffered.

Before Moroni closed his account in the Book of Mormon with an exhortation to “come unto Christ” (Moroni 10:30, 32), he shared with us a personal letter from his father. It must have had a great impact on him, and I suppose he hoped it would have a great impact on us: “My son, be faithful in Christ; and may not the things which I have written grieve thee, to weigh thee down unto death; but may Christ lift thee up, and may his sufferings and death,

and the showing his body unto our fathers, and his mercy and long-suffering, and the hope of his glory and of eternal life, rest in your mind forever” (Moroni 9:25).

Among the things that are to rest in our minds forever are the “sufferings and death” of Christ. We should not avoid thinking about the price He paid to win our souls. Our hymns remind us of this truth:

*I think of his hands pierced and bleeding to pay the debt!
Such mercy, such love, and devotion can I forget?²*

*Let me not forget, O Savior,
Thou didst bleed and die for me.³*

*Think of me, thou ransomed one;
Think what I for thee have done.
With my blood that dripped like rain,
Sweat in agony of pain,
With my body on the tree
I have ransomed even thee.⁴*

In a recent sacrament meeting, I followed along as the speaker read a familiar passage of scripture: “Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God” (D&C 18:10). Then my mind seized hold on an idea in the next verse that I had never noticed before. To prove the great worth of our souls, the Lord told us, “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*” (D&C 18:11; emphasis added).

His suffering proves His love, but it does more. It is the means He uses to get us to “repent and come unto him.” When we come to have some sense of what He has done for us—and, in particular, what He has suffered for us—our natural reaction as children of God is to want to show our gratitude and love by obeying Him. This verse is, in my opinion, the most succinct and profound description—from the Lord Himself—of how to get the gospel into our hearts.

The best way to persuade people to repent and come unto Christ is to get them to think about what He has done for us and especially about what He has suffered for us. That is how the Lord does it.

Remember Him

Several years ago I heard Elder Gerald N. Lund of the Seventy describe a magazine article about rock climbing. The article discussed belaying—the fail-safe system that protects climbers. One climber gets into a safe position, fastens the rope in a fixed position, then calls to his or her companion, “You’re on belay”—meaning “I’ve got you.” The director of a climbing school, Alan Czenkusch, described his experience with belaying to the author of the article:

“Belaying has brought Czenkusch his best and worst moments in climbing. Czenkusch once fell from a high precipice, yanking out three mechanical supports and pulling his belayer off a ledge. He was stopped, upside down, 10 feet [3 m] from the ground when his spread-eagled belayer arrested the fall with the strength of his outstretched arms.

“‘Don saved my life,’ says Czenkusch. ‘How do you respond to a guy like that? Give him a used climbing rope for a Christmas present? No, you remember him. You always remember him.’”⁵

President Gordon B. Hinckley told us:

“No member of this Church must ever forget the terrible price paid by our Redeemer, who gave His life that all men might live—the agony of Gethsemane, the bitter mockery of His trial, the vicious crown of thorns tearing at His flesh, the blood cry of the mob before Pilate, the lonely burden of His heavy walk along the way to Calvary, the terrifying pain as great nails pierced His hands and feet. . . .

“We cannot forget that. We must never forget it, for here our Savior, our Redeemer, the Son of God, gave Himself, a vicarious sacrifice for each of us.”⁶

May we always remember Him and the price He paid to win our souls. ■

From a Brigham Young University devotional address given on March 14, 2006.

NOTES

1. “The Mediator,” *Ensign*, May 1977, 56.
2. “I Stand All Amazed,” *Hymns*, no. 193.
3. “In Humility, Our Savior,” *Hymns*, no. 172.
4. “Reverently and Meekly Now,” *Hymns*, no. 185.
5. In Eric G. Anderson, “The Vertical Wilderness,” *Private Practice*, Nov. 1979, 21.
6. “The Symbol of Our Faith,” *Liabona and Ensign*, Apr. 2005, 4.