

Reconciled



By Elder
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Of the Seventy



to God

Years ago while serving as a bishop in Sydney, Australia, I had the great privilege of counting among the members of my ward an elderly man who was a thorough gentleman. Joe Herbert, who had lost his wife earlier in life, had remarried and accepted the gospel as fully as the people of King Benjamin and the father of King Lamoni (see Mosiah 5:2; Alma 22:15).

His second wife did not share Joe's faith, but he was not deterred in the least—either in his love for her or for the gospel. He was as kind as one would imagine the Savior to be and would always volunteer to help others despite his advancing age.

Joe had emigrated from South Africa in order to leave the apartheid system that then existed in his native land. His immigration meant that he had lost most of the assets he had accumulated in South Africa. As a result, he only just coped financially, although he was fiercely independent. Australia became his adopted country, and he quickly assimilated and contributed to the ward and the Church.

Joe possessed good carpentry skills he would use to make unexpected gifts for ward members from time to time as acts of service.

Everybody loved Joe, but something happened that affected him deeply. In Australia, if a pedestrian approaches a marked pedestrian crossing, traffic is obliged to stop and give the right of way. This rule is not only policed but also meticulously followed by almost all motorists.

One day Joe was using such a crossing, when he saw an approaching car. It was traveling slowly enough to easily stop, but the driver failed to do so and struck Joe. He suffered a significant injury to his lower body. After surgery, Joe could no longer walk without using a cane and experiencing significant pain. No one had witnessed the accident, and the driver blamed the accident on what she described as Joe's "reckless inattention."

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PHOTOGRAPH OF HANDS BY DIEGO CERVO/ISTOCK/THINKSTOCK
PHOTOGRAPH OF CANE BY ANDRZEJ TOKARSKI/ISTOCK/THINKSTOCK



A MESSAGE OF LOVE

"[The gospel] is the good news that Jesus Christ has made a perfect Atonement for mankind. It is the message of love, hope, and mercy that there is a reconciliation of man with God.

"Sin is the willful transgression of divine law. The Atonement of Jesus Christ is the gift of God to His children to correct and overcome the consequences of sin."

President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, "Point of Safe Return," *Ensign*, May 2007, 99.

Without witnesses or any way to corroborate Joe's description of the accident, the police and courts were unable to determine blame. If the facts had been known, Joe could have appropriately sought restitution. As it was, Joe, who had only sufficient income to support his wife and himself, began to feel deep bitterness toward the driver for his pain and associated medical costs. The driver's denial of the truth was foreign to Joe's own feelings about integrity and responsibility for one's actions. He could not understand it.

After struggling to control the anger welling inside him for this injustice, he approached me, concerned for the way he was feeling. He had prayed to feel otherwise, but his prayers seemed unanswered.

Forgive One Another

As Joe's bishop, and feeling much empathy for my friend, I sought the Lord's help in understanding how I could assist him. Then I remembered the following verse of scripture: "Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin" (D&C 64:9).

I wondered why the Lord would give such apparently unfair counsel. Why should someone like Joe be held as having committed a

greater sin than the driver who had not only injured him but also compounded her error by failing to take responsibility for the incident? Was this too difficult a principle to live? How would I respond in such a situation?

As I pondered the next verses, I began to understand.

"I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.

"And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds" (D&C 64:10–11).

At first this may seem to imply that God will take vengeance for us and that we should simply bide our time until He punishes the guilty party. Although He may eventually choose to do that, this verse said much more to me and in a completely different tone.

What I felt from reading this was that we are not the ones to determine or demand a price for an offense committed against us. That is not our role. Only the Lord Jesus Christ has that right. Why? Because He has paid the price for all sins. Any transgression committed against us has already had its price paid—by the Atonement of our Savior and Redeemer. We do not have the right to exact any further price, and we must leave the issue totally in His hands.

MEANING OF RECONCILIATION

What does it mean to be reconciled to God? The Bible Dictionary describes the Atonement as "the setting 'at one' of those who have been estranged and denotes the reconciliation of man to God. Sin is the cause of the estrangement, and therefore the purpose of atonement is to correct or overcome the consequences of sin" ("Atonement").

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, "Reconciliation is the process of ransoming man from his state of sin and spiritual darkness and of restoring him to a state of harmony and unity with Deity" (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. [1965–73], 2:422).



An Atonement for All

The Lord may require a further price from some who fail to take advantage of His Atonement and repent, but that decision has nothing to do with us. Our role is simply to forgive, as He taught, and to be reconciled to both the offender and to God.

When we fail to forgive, even when such forgiveness is not sought, we commit the terrible sin of denying the power of the Atonement. The Atonement is not just for me; it is also for those who cause offense against me, who injure me, who gossip about me, and who rob me of those things that are most precious. The Savior suffered the Atonement for all of God's children—the obedient *and* the disobedient.

Joe and I talked about this at length. It brought him peace and understanding. His physical pain did not disappear, but his spiritual anguish was healed and he gained additional strength to carry his burden. As the Lord said to Paul the Apostle, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Whatever pains and burdens we bear in this life, the Atonement of Jesus Christ provides us with the ability to carry them because the Savior makes them light.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am

meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30).

The words of Paul sum up well the reconciliation offered through the Lord:

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:18–20).

Joe appropriately focused on things not visible to many. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

My friend Joe Herbert has since passed away. I can't know for sure, but I am confident of where he is. He is a friend I hope to greet in a future day. I expect to see him walking freely and clothed in glory because he understood the Atonement. And while on earth, he had become reconciled to God. ■