



By Elder
Tad R. Callister
Of the Presidency
of the Seventy

How Do I **KNOW** *When I Am* **FORGIVEN?**

When I served as mission president, missionaries often asked these two questions: (1) How do I know when I am forgiven of my sins? and (2) If I am forgiven, why do I still feel guilt?

When asked those questions, I usually responded by saying, “If you feel the Spirit—when you pray, read the scriptures, teach, testify, or at any other time—then that is your witness that you have been forgiven or, alternatively, that the cleansing process is taking place, for the Spirit cannot dwell in an unholy tabernacle” (see Alma 7:21). In most cases the cleansing process takes time because our change of heart takes time, but in the interim, we can proceed with the confidence that God approves of our progress as manifested by the presence of His Spirit.

Some people are harder on themselves than the Lord is. Of course,

we must repent to be eligible for the cleansing and forgiving powers of the Atonement, but once we have repented, there is no such thing as a spotted repenter in God’s kingdom. There is no black mark on our right ankle that says “2008 sin” or brown stain behind our left ear that says “2010 trespass.” The Lord declared the comprehensive cleansing power of the Atonement when He said, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). That is the miracle of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

On some occasions I believe our sins are cleansed before the guilt goes away. Why is that? Perhaps in God’s mercy, the memory of that guilt is a warning, a spiritual “stop sign” that cries out when similar temptations confront us: “Don’t go down that road. You know the pain it can bring.” Perhaps for those in the process of

repenting, it is meant to be a protection, not a punishment.

Will our guilt ever go away? The promise of the Lord is certain in that regard. To the righteous, the Lord said that the time would come when “there shall be no more . . . sorrow, nor crying, *neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away*” (Revelation 21:4; emphasis added).

I do not know if we will forget our sins, but the time will come when those who repent will no longer be troubled by their sins. Such was the case with Enos, whose “guilt was swept away” (Enos 1:6), and the converted Lamanites, who witnessed that the Lord had “taken away the guilt from our hearts” (Alma 24:10), and with Alma, who exclaimed, “I could remember my pains *no more*” (Alma 36:19; emphasis added). No doubt all of them remembered their sins, but



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somehow they were no longer troubled by them. The infinite powers of the Atonement miraculously healed every wound and soothed every conscience with “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

There seem to be two conditions that will free us from all guilt and pain. First is our unwavering faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement. When Enos asked how his guilt was “swept away” (see Enos 1:6–7), the Lord responded, “Because of thy faith in Christ” (Enos 1:8). Accordingly, the more we learn about the Atonement and exercise faith in Christ’s healing powers, the greater our ability to be forgiven and to forgive ourselves. Second is the development of a character that has “no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). When this happens, we no longer view ourselves in our “carnal state” (Mosiah 4:2) but as spiritually begotten sons and daughters of God. We recognize that we are a different person than the one who sinned. Scrooge, the famous character in Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, had so transformed his life that he could rightfully declare, “I am not the man I was.”¹

As we repent, we become a different person than we were. The realization of our new identity, coupled with our faith in Christ’s cleansing powers, helps us reach the point

where we can say as Alma said, “I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more” (Alma 36:19). Accordingly, we can be comforted by the truth that God will ultimately judge us by what we have become, not by what we were.

The Apostle Paul gave some constructive counsel to all of us who have sinned but are striving to repent. He said we should be “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Philippians 3:13). In other words, we should put the past behind us and press forward, trusting in God’s redeeming power. Such an effort on our part is a demonstration of faith. Further, Paul counseled, “Happy is he that condemneth not himself” (Romans 14:22).

In the meantime, until that final drop of guilt is removed, if we feel the Lord’s Spirit we can proceed with confidence that we have been cleansed or that the cleansing process is working its divine miracle in our life. The promise is certain—if we do our best to repent, we will be cleansed of our sins and our guilt will eventually be swept away, because the Savior’s Atonement descended not only below our sins but also our guilt. Then we will be at perfect peace with ourselves and with God. ■

NOTE

1. Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol in Prose* (1843), 150.