Book Review: The Infinite Atonement, Tad R. Callister

The atonement of Jesus Christ is the most important doctrine we could study and understand. Some have defined the gospel as the atonement, for surely everything in the gospel points to the atonement. No other doctrine equals or exceeds it in importance. All truth would be meaningless if it were not for the atonement; because without the atonement the most soul inspiring and edifying truth would still lead to our destruction and damnation. Without the atonement we would be subject to Satan forever despite our best efforts.

The atonement was the most critical event of all history. The birth of Jesus Christ was significant, but if our Lord chose not to carry through with the atonement or shrunk when it was hard for Him; the entire plan of God would have been ruined. Jesus Christ saved us. His sacrifice is incomprehensible.

**With The Atonement We Have Everything, Without It We Have Nothing**

The atonement is infinite in many aspects. It is infinite in the following:

- Nature
- Power
- Time
- Coverage
- Depth
- Suffering
- Love
- Blessings
- Divineness

The purpose of the atonement is threefold; 1. To restore all that was lost by the fall of Adam, 2. To give us the possibility to repent and become clean of our filthiness and 3. To exalt us so we can become God’s ourselves.

**The Atonement Is Infinite In Nature**

It has no bounds or limits. There is nothing that the Lord can’t reach, He has descended below all things. Because a God performed the sacrifice, He can raise you to the highest. He can turn you into a God. Jesus Christ obtained Godhood in the pre-existence, which is why it is infinite in nature. Jesus Christ is omniscient. There is nothing He doesn’t know or can’t do. He knows every topic and subject both secular and spiritual to perfection. He is not learning any new skill tactic or technique to save souls. He does not increase in glory through learning because
there is nothing new to learn for Him. He is infinite in every Godly trait, and because we can’t possibly list all His traits we say He has an infinity of goodness.

**The Atonement Is Infinite In Power**

Jesus Christ has the power to save every man and woman and child. Power is directly connected with divine virtues. The more Godly virtues you develop the more power you have. Your power can’t exceed your attributes. You become powerful by being added upon, and becoming something that you currently are not.

You also gain power by giving away the power you already have. Jesus Christ grew from grace to grace. The character of Christ is that He always thought about others and was constantly helping others. He always gave his grace or help to others, and because of that Heavenly Father blessed Him with more grace or help. The more you give the more you receive.

The Lord also said you lose power when you exercise it in unrighteousness, which often falls under compulsion or force. Few people can handle positions of power because it gets to their head and they abuse it.

**The Atonement Is Infinite In Time**

The atonement is timeless. We lived with Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in a life before coming down here. We depended on Jesus Christ there for our salvation. We could sin in the pre-existence. Overcoming our sins and becoming what we should in the pre-existence required that we relied on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, just like we must on earth.

Jesus Christ was God the Son even in our first estate (Pre earth life). He had proven Himself worthy in every respect. He was the first spirit born child to Heavenly Father. Jesus Christ lived the eternal laws perfectly to eventually become a God. We all knew that only Jesus Christ could be our Savior, and He volunteered to be our Savior.

The Lord made a covenant in the pre-existence that He would carry out the atonement. When a God such as Jesus Christ makes a covenant, it is impossible to break it. The God’s can’t break covenants or they would cease to be God’s and that is impossible. We were assured of His success because of the covenant He made.

There is an exception. It is never too late to repent, unless you have over a long period of time refused to repent. The scriptures say eventually there will come a
time when you passed up your chance to repent. There will be a final judgment at some point; which may be the time where repentance is too late.

**The Atonement Is Infinite In Coverage**

Jesus Christ is the creator of an infinite number of worlds and life forms to populate it. The atonement covers every form of life that populates all the worlds created by Jesus Christ and all of Heavenly Father’s children who inhabit the worlds created by the Lord. All the animals and plants depend on the atonement. Every form of life will be redeemed. This earth will eventually die and be resurrected and transformed into the Celestial Kingdom.

**The Atonement Is Infinite In Depth**

There is no sin, weakness or suffering that the atonement can’t touch or heal. He can help you turn every weakness into a strength, but make it into a perfection.

Jesus Christ completely immersed Himself in the mortal experience. When it came to the pains and sufferings of mortal life, He shed His title of God and faced it through His human side. He could have learned it all through revelation but He chose to experience it directly through experience. He did not use His position as God to shield Himself from the trials of life.

In fact, His Godhood status caused Him to suffer more not less. The pains He felt especially in Gethsemane and on the cross was as a man and not a God. At the same time nobody could take His life. His Godhood allowed Him to suffer pain longer and more acutely.

He loved more and was closer to the spirit more than anyone else. He grieved the most for others because He cared the most. The Lord was like a sponge, He didn’t avoid any of the trials of life.

**The Five Types of Suffering**

1. Sin
2. Innocent transgressions of the law.
3. Suffering related to infirmities, weaknesses, inadequacies or trials that have nothing to do with sin or transgression.
4. Suffering incidental to our confrontation with the temptations of the world.
5. Suffering or anxiety necessitated by the exercise of faith.
Suffering Caused By Sin

Jesus Christ took upon Him all the sins of everyone. He suffered for those who would repent and those who would not repent. The exception is the unpardonable sin which makes one a son of perdition.

The Innocent Transgressions Of The Law

There are multi billions of people who have not accepted the Lord's gospel and commandments. Little children are also innocent before the Lord. Children do not need baptism.

Suffering Related To Infirmities, Weaknesses, Inadequacies Or Trials That Have Nothing To Do With Sin Or Transgression

It is important to distinguish between sin and weakness. Weaknesses don’t fall under the same category as sin. Weaknesses play an important role in life. Weaknesses help us in our growth, but sin does not. They help us remain humble. They cause us to rely on God and not our own strength. With the Lord’s help they become strengths. Turning weaknesses into strengths is a process, and it significantly builds your faith when you see a strength that was once a weakness that afflicted you.

You should not be offended if with your best efforts and faith your weakness remains. The Lord didn’t always remove other’s weaknesses because He knew that the particular weakness would bring them to Him.

Suffering Incidental To Our Confrontation With The Temptations Of The World

Temptation is nearly a constant threat. It forces you to choose sides and makes sure there is no neutrality. Christ was tempted like we are and again He did not put on His Godhood force shield to make Him immune to temptation. He was tempted as a man. The Lord overcame His temptations by giving no heed to them. When tempting thoughts entered His mind He expelled them immediately. He did not process tempting thoughts or let them take root.

Suffering Or Anxiety Necessitated By The Exercise Of Faith

We have trials of our faith and so did the Lord. We don’t always know how things will turn out and neither did He. When the Lord was in Gethsemane, He plead to the Father if there was another way. He asked for another cup to drink. Gethsemane was a lot harder than He thought it would be. He knew intellectually beforehand that it would be hard but the experience of it proved to be extremely challenging. The Cross and losing the Father’s constant spirit was more excruciating for the Lord than Gethsemane was.
Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ want all of us to have the faith to step out into the darkness in faith not knowing how the future will turn out. This should give us peace for those times when we undertake something difficult that we can't see the light at the end of the tunnel. We might walk in the dark for a distance before we see the flicker of light. God wants us to be righteous in the dark.

The Lord also didn’t become perfect overnight. He became perfect by the things He suffered. He grew from grace to grace.

**The Atonement Was Infinite In Suffering**

I have already talked about how Christ did not put on a Godhood shield to protect Himself from pain, suffering and all the issues you and I must deal with in life. He chose to face it all as a man. Because He was a God, He could suffer well beyond the point of death of any man. His Godhood allowed Him to suffer pain beyond comprehension. His Godhood made Him suffer infinitely more not less.

Jesus Christ literally sweat blood. It was not figurative like some think. His suffering in Gethsemane was intense enough to require an angel to help Him.

The Lord battled with Satan. It was more than a defensive war, holding the line. The Lord knew that Satan must be destroyed and overcome and in order to do that He couldn't just sit there and take it. The Lord had to go on the offensive. He invaded Satan's territory and did battle with Him there. The Lord went into the darkest, scariest corners of hell to conquer Satan and hell. The Lord's invasion of Satan's basecamp was a one-man rescue mission to deliver all the prisoners from hell.

This means Jesus Christ has already determined the final outcome of this battle. Thanks to the Lord, Satan has lost the war. Satan is permitted power to cause chaos and havoc in this world to provide opposition; which is what makes this life a test and probation. People commonly ask and some use it as an excuse not to believe in God is this; why does God allow so much evil and suffering? If there is a God why doesn't He stop it? The answer is because of agency. Agency is an eternal principle that God can’t deny. God could stop every evil and tragedy and death, but doing that would be counter to the purposes of this life. He allows evil people their agency to do evil things, but they don't get to choose the consequences for their actions.

The Cross caused the Lord more suffering than Gethsemane. The atoning sacrifice from Gethsemane continued on the cross.
The Cross was His greatest trial. The Lord must have been worn out by then, with everything that lead up to the Cross. The Cross was considered at the time the most cruel way to die, and maybe that is one reason why he hung on the cross.

The critics discount the Lord’s pain on the cross because other men also were crucified on the cross. No other man experienced Gethsemane before the Cross like Christ did. The Lord drank the full cup all over again on the Cross.

The battle with Satan and his entire Army would have been the most intense and challenging with Christ on the Cross. The Lord was the most vulnerable, it was at this time that the Father denied Him the spirit. Although the Lord would have been the most vulnerable and at His lowest, it shows Him at his best. It shows His great character. His energy and will to fight would have been spent at this point, but He fought on anyway. The shock of losing the Fathers spirit was intense. The loss of His Father’s spirit literally broke His heart, which was the cause of His death. But the Lord was able to wage war with Satan and conquer him without the help of His Father. Jesus Christ was successful in being righteous in the dark, when He didn’t the love of God.

The question must be raised why Heavenly Father withdrew His spirit from the Lord? Jesus Christ had to know the consequences of sin. The consequence of sin is darkness, misery and the rejection of the spirit. The spirit does not reside in unholy temples. The Lord had to experience the loss of spirit firsthand, so when we sin and lose the spirit He knows how to help us get it back.

**The Atonement Was Infinite In Love**

Everything the Lord did in His life was for us. He didn’t anything that was selfish or for Himself. He didn’t have to do the atonement. He lived a sinless life. My personal opinion is, if Christ had not followed through with the atonement He still would have returned to Heavenly Father as His only begotten Son and as God the Son. Had He not done the atonement ONLY He would have returned. There would have been only three people in heaven; Heavenly Father, Heavenly Mother, and Jesus Christ.

He did it out of love and He loved us with the same level and quality of love that God the Father has for us. The prophets say that Jesus Christ came to earth to show us who the Father is. Everything the Lord did on earth is what Heavenly Father would have done. The way the Lord treated people is the way the Father would have treated them. Jesus Christ was the perfect agent (representative) for God. If you know the Son you know the Father. The way to the Father is through the Son.

The atonement was the greatest act of love. He didn’t do it for duty, honor or glory. Only love had the power to see Him through it. My personal feeling is any other motivation except love would have caused Him to walk away, to pour out the cup
and not drink it. Jesus Christ loved all of us enough to do whatever it took to bring us into heaven. He knew that heaven would not be heaven without us there.

Heavenly Father withdrawing His spirit from the Lord shows His great love for us. Certainly it caused Heavenly Father unbelievable suffering to watch His perfect Son suffer like He did. Our Father knew there was no other way to save the rest of us. Father was willing to sacrifice Him for us. Certainly God wouldn’t have allowed Christ to suffer any more than was necessary. Had Heavenly Father relieved the Lord’s pain one second before it was time, the whole plan would have been void.

There is not greater force in the world than love. People do great and glorious things in the name of love. Love is the defining characteristic of discipleship. The prophets teach that love is the symbol of the LDS faith.

The pure love of Christ is charity, which is a mandatory virtue to be as He is and to be in His presence. Charity is more than a feeling; it is a state of being. The atonement proves that you can love someone when you are hurting. Love is internally driven and not dependent on the actions of others.

The Book of Mormon in Moroni 7: 45 defines charity as;

- Suffers long
- Kind
- Does not envy
- Does not get puffed up
- Seeketh not her own
- Is not easily provoked
- Thinks no evil
- Does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in truth
- Bears all things
- Believes all things
- Hopes in all things
- Endures all things

Charity is the one thing that is guaranteed not to fail, when everything else fails. Charity is mandatory for eternal life.

The hug is the symbol of the atonement, specifically a personal embrace by the Lord. It is guaranteed that the day will come when you will meet the Lord in person; certainly in the final judgment if not before.
The Atonement Is Infinite In Power

It has already been mentioned that the Lord is all powerful partly because He has acquired every divine attribute to perfection, and He knows all.

There are at least three things that bring power;

- Knowledge
- Purity
- Love

This next section describes how the Lord is infinite in power in His resurrection, repentance, His succoring help and motivation.

The Resurrection

Jesus Christ was resurrected and technically that was part of the atonement. What would be the point of life if we could not have a perfect body after we die? Because the Lord was resurrected, everyone will be. This is an unconditional gift and is not dependent on how we live our life.

The resurrection is proof that life continues beyond the grave. The prophets teach that those in the spirit world are anxiously waiting to be returned to their bodies, but this time it will be perfect without any defects never again to experience physical pain, disease, suffering or death. We are eternal beings.

Repentance

Repentance is a key aspect of the atonement, because that is how we access it. Repentance is a repeated theme in the book and in this review. Repentance is how we overcome sin, but it is more than that; it is an attitude and heart change. It is a turning toward God. It is about lining up your desires with the Lord’s and doing what He wants you to do and instead of what you want. Real growth happens when your wants are His wants.

There is a difference between Godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Godly sorrow is the broken heart, which is a desire to be right with God and receive His blessings. Worldly sorrow is when you are caught doing something wrong, but feel sorry that you were caught.

Sin destroys us spiritually. The author says sin causes us to “lose strength and resiliency to confront each new temptation.” Sin makes it harder to resist temptation.
The Lord was able to expel every evil thought and would not allow it to make its home in His brain. Sin makes resistance difficult. Some have a false belief that sinning gives you necessary experience. You will always be a stronger person by resisting than succumbing to sin. Sin will always hurt you, even if you repent.

Repentance is a change of heart, a determination to make things right with God. It always involves a broken heart and contrite spirit. Pain always accompanies repentance; however, when you repent the pain is much less than if you didn’t repent.

We all sin; there is no mortal who doesn’t, even the most righteous sin. Many sins are as Elder Oaks said that are like small like grand’s of sand that come out in the wash. **Perfection in this life does not mean a life without sin or weakness.** The standard we should strive for in this life is not being without sin because that is simply impossible, but our standard should be being blameless. Blameless means repenting every night of the day's sins.

There is a difference in being perfect like Christ and being perfect in Christ. Our standard in this life should be being perfect in Christ, which is to always be learning how to more fully rely on and work with Him instead of our own strength.

**Salvation is impossible without repentance.**

Our ability to acquire greater light and truth is weakened by sin. Sin darkens our countenance. Sin also makes it much more difficult to receive personal revelation, the messages are very faint in sin. The ability to receive, recognize and act on inspiration from God is a key to living up to your highest potential and experiencing tremendous joy in life.

**The Lord’s Succoring Power**

The Lord’s compassion exceeds any wrong we do. The Lord's mortal profession as a carpenter has spiritual symbolism. He can fix anything that is broken. The author said, “His spirit heals; it refines; it comforts; it breathes new life into hopeless hearts. It has the power to transform all that is ugly and vicious and worthless in life to something that is something of supreme and glorious splendor.”

The Lord always stands with open outstretched arms always. He is at the door knocking but the doorknob is on your side not His. He cannot enter your life uninvited.

Some of the best-written words about the Lord’s succoring power is in the Book of Mormon in Alma 7.
Vs 11: “And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and sicknesses of his people.”

Vs 12: “And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.”

**The Motivating Power And The Power To Exalt**

The atonement is the greatest motivating power. It does more than heal us from our sins. It provides a powerful pull to be better. One of the great aspects of the atonement is to make bad men good and good men better.

The atonement provides the motivation to be like God, to eventually make us into a God.

The critics are offended at the thought that man can literally become a God and say it is blasphemy to say such things. Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are perfect in every divine way. They lack nothing. The only way they are added upon is when we too become God's like them. The critics say that it brings God down or lessens His position when we become like them. The truth is they are glorified more not less when we take upon ourselves their divine nature. Every new divine attribute and gift of the spirit we acquire glorifies God, because it increases our power to be instruments in His hands.

The Lord came to earth to stand in place of His Father, to be like and do what the Father would say and do. The Lord asks us to do the same thing, to be his representatives or agents. This is how we create righteousness and lift the world from sin and wickedness.

We have control over our spiritual destiny. The God's are internally driven and so must we.

We are added upon through the atonement. The atonement can raise us higher than we were in the pre-existence.

**Justice And Mercy**

The author admits that nobody fully understands the link between justice and mercy. Understanding justice is necessary to understand how Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ became God's. Our doctrine is that Heavenly Father (God) lived a life like we are currently living. Some critics condemn this doctrine, but in reality it is a
glorious one because it shows that God the Father went through what we are going through and made it, which means we too can make it.

Our salvation is in Jesus Christ, we can’t know the Father without first knowing the Son. It is the Lord who will be our final judge not God the Father.

There are eternal laws that have existed long before Heavenly Father became a God. He became who He is because He learned those laws that govern the God’s and lived them perfectly. The standard to become a God is to learn the laws and live them, which is what He and Jesus Christ did. The God’s can’t break laws if they want to remain as such; but that will not happen because they have progressed to a state of being that breaking the laws is impossible.

Justice requires that when we break a law a punishment be exerted. This is another reason why the atonement required the sacrifice of a God (Jesus Christ). For us to become God’s and create our own worlds, we must also learn the laws like our Father did and keep them. Our job in this life is to keep the commandments. It will take a long while in the next life to learn and master all the laws.

Without Jesus Christ atoning for us, the first time we broke a law we would not only forfeit Godhood forever but would be subject to Satan.

Works and grace is a part of justice and mercy. Some debate about whether we are saved by justice or mercy, thinking that it is all one or the other. Salvation is not all in justice or all in mercy, but is a combination of both. Justice and mercy is required for salvation.

The prophets have said that it would mock the Lord’s sacrifice if it didn’t require effort on our part. The Lord expects us to give our best or most diligent effort. The Lord’s grace is His enabling power. Our best effort is not enough, and His perfect love is also not enough to save us because He can’t force us into Heaven. Salvation requires the combination of our hard work and His help.
We also need the Lord's mercy to be saved. His mercy is the softening or the waiving broken laws. This mercy is granted through repentance. Repentance always involves pain and sinning always results in a loss of spirituality. You will never gain valuable learning experience by sinning. That is one of Satan's most successful lies. The time spent repenting could have been spent progressing forward.

Repentance is like white out, it makes it as though you didn't sin. Through genuine repentance you become qualified to be justified to obtain Godhood through a continual process of repenting and keeping the laws required for Godhood.

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