

Book of Mormon Study – Alma 39-42

Online zoom Sunday School, 2 Aug 2020

(<https://jayball.name/book-of-mormon-study-lessons>)

Sexual Immorality

Alma 39:5

Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost?

Here is an unsettling verse. Framed as a question, Alma puts us to the test. Alma is speaking to his son Corianton, who had gone to serve as a missionary, but served poorly. In his pride and arrogance, he wound up in sexual sin and abandoned his mission. As Alma counsels with Corianton, we find he has lost his belief in angels ministering to men (see Alma 39:19). Corianton no longer trusts the miraculous.

"Adulterers" have a difficult time believing in such things. They seek signs because they have a hard time believing. (see Matt 12:39). But faith does not come from signs.

Signs do not give rise to faith. They have no meaning in the lives of the unbelieving and disobedient. Without obedience, no one can acquire faith. Without faith, signs are nothing. The Pharisees who asked for a sign would not have been persuaded had they been given one. Just as Laman and Lemuel were unimpressed with an angel (1 Ne 3:31), Alma's son Corianton would also have been unimpressed.

Corianton's disbelief in angels is really a rejection of his father's conversion story. It is a rejection of the truths, testimony and witness of his father. He has crippled himself spiritually.

Although tragic for him, it is fortunate for us. Alma's teachings to Corianton are among the greatest teachings of the Book of Mormon. The chapters dealing with Alma's warnings and instructions are not only tailored for Corianton, but also for the Saints today who suffer from many similar sins and consequent misgivings.

Commenting on adultery, Joseph Smith taught that adulterers could not inherit the Celestial Kingdom:

*In the evening the High Council sat on the case of Harrison Sagers, charged with seduction, and having stated that I had taught it was right. Charge not sustained. I was present with several of the Twelve, and gave an address tending to do away with every evil, and exhorting them to practice virtue and holiness before the Lord; told them that the Church had not received any permission from me to commit fornication, adultery, or any corrupt action; but my every word and action has been to the contrary. **If a man commit adultery, he cannot receive the celestial kingdom of God. Even if he is saved in any kingdom, it cannot be the celestial kingdom.** I did think that the many examples that have been made manifest, such as John C. Bennett's and others, were sufficient to show the fallacy of such a course of conduct." (DHC 6: 81; emphasis added.)*

Adultery in all likelihood breaks the hearts of spouses and children. Oftentimes it causes broken families. Many broken families are condemned to struggle financially over a lifetime. These financial struggles result in lost educational opportunities, or embittered children, or other lifelong penalties being inflicted upon the innocent. When these terrible results are considered, it shows the difficulties which this sin imposes upon the repentant soul. How can adequate restitution be made from some of these consequences? It is better by far to avoid the sin so such questions and struggles do not occur. With an adequate program of warning this sin may be avoided. Temptations were never meant to overwhelm us, although they invariably confront us.

Corianton suffered under the burden of this sin, and as a result had lost faith in his father's testimony. However, Alma's comments to this wayward son end on a hopeful note: "And now, O my son, ye are called of God to preach the word unto this people. And now, my son, go thy way, declare the word with truth and soberness, that thou mayest bring souls unto repentance, that the great plan of mercy may have claim upon them. And may God grant unto you even according to my words. Amen." (.) Alma reminds us of the same doctrine James taught in the New Testament. We can save ourselves from sin by working to bring others to repentance. "Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." (.) For every harsh result there is a merciful answer. Alma the Younger sought his own repentance and restitution by his missionary efforts. Here, he calls his son Corianton to do the same. Any soul who finds themselves in a similar predicament can use the same process for their own repentance. They, too, can save a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins. Broken families, disappointed children, misery and grief may be counterbalanced by the conversion of others to the Gospel. Lives restored, hope given, repentance undertaken, and children blessed from converting others can "hide a multitude of sins."

Christ holds the keys of death and hell. Surely He intends to use them for anyone He can possibly save. But we must give Him something to work with to bring us salvation. Sin no more, repent, obey, preach repentance, save souls and redeem your own soul in the process.

Angels still visit mankind. You can trust the testimonies of those who have received them. Alma was one of those who received them, and he wrote the verse we have been discussing. Joseph Smith was a prophet of God, whose advice and counsel you can trust as well. This sin is serious, and may be fatal if you do not repent. You are still called to the work, no matter your sin, just as Corianton returned to preaching the Gospel. Your own exaltation may depend upon preaching repentance to others. (ibid 100-102)

Alma 39:9

"*cross yourself in all these things*", Stick of Joseph renders this "*contain yourself*".

Alma 40:12

And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.

We develop during mortality and receive from this life exactly what we develop into while mortal.

Alma 41:3

And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works

It does not say that God will do the judging.

Alma 41:7

for behold, they are their own judges, whether to do good or do evil.

This agrees with what Joseph Smith said:

"A man is his own tormentor and his own condemner. Hence the saying, 'They shall go into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.' The torment of disappointment in the mind of man is as exquisite as a lake burning with fire and brimstone. I say, so is the torment of man." (TPJS pg 357)

Consider these words from Moroni:

Then will ye longer deny the Christ, or can ye behold the Lamb of God? Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with him under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws? Behold, I say unto you that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell. For behold, when ye shall be brought to see your nakedness before God, and also the glory of God, and the holiness of Jesus Christ, it will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you. (Mormon 9:3-5)

Now I want you to read those verses carefully, and ask yourself, Exactly what is it that God is doing? You will discover the only thing that God is doing is being. He simply exists. This terrible ordeal being described is you. God is. He is simply revealing Himself to you. And this is your reaction. And why is this your reaction? Because you don't have the power of godliness. Why don't you have that? Because you need to repent. And what is it that you must repent of? The absence of knowledge about God. You don't know enough yet to be saved. The plan of salvation is the plan of education, the plan of knowledge about God and the principles of godliness.

Alma 41:9

points of doctrine

Is this a different definition of doctrine than that used by Christ in 3 Ne 11:28-40? (see also 2 Ne 31:2-21, D&C 10:67-68)

I think there is a difference between "points of doctrine" and "doctrine of Christ".

Happiness

Alma 41:10

Wickedness never was happiness.

The word "happiness" occurs 13 times in these 4 chapters.

In chapter 40 it is used to describe a "state of happiness" and contrasts it with the state of misery that exists in that "space between death and the resurrection of the body, and a state of the soul in happiness or in misery until the time which is appointed of God that the dead shall come forth, and be reunited, both soul and body, and be brought to stand before God, and be judged according to their works." (40:21)

But here in chapter 41, in verses 4-5, happiness is something that is restored in the resurrection to those who sought happiness in this life. And, of course, here in verse 10 the clarification that you can't restore something that was wickedness to something that will be happiness.

And now, my son, all men that are in a state of nature, or I would say, in a carnal state, are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; they are without God in the world, and they have gone contrary to the nature of God; therefore, they are in a state contrary to the nature of happiness.

Compare, 2 Nephi 5:27 he says: "And it came to pass that we lived after the manner of happiness." Yet Nephi also tells us they suffered many afflictions in the wilderness (see 2 Ne 4:20). After the manner of happiness does not mean without affliction.

"Happiness is the object and design of our existence; and will be the end thereof, if we pursue the path that leads to it; and this path is virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness, and keeping all the commandments of God" (TPJS, pg 255–56).

In chapter 42 Alma speaks of a "plan of happiness" (twice).

Now, repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment, which also was eternal as the life of the soul should be, affixed opposite to the plan of happiness, which was as eternal also as the life of the soul. (42:9)

Alma 41:15

For that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored; therefore, the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all.

There is an equation. Everything will balance. You rich people had good before but allowed Lazarus to suffer from evil you could have relieved. Now it is put back into balance. In the immediate afterlife you get to suffer so you may understand the error of your way. You may at last understand how charity is critical to make the universe whole. See, if you are one who chooses to inflict tears (or even ignore tears you might have wiped away), then that will be recompensed to you. And if you wipe away tears from others, that will be returned to you, as well. Because what will be restored unto you is exactly, as we began with Alma, what you send out. It is an equation, after all.

Alma 42:9

JJournal - 15 Feb 2019 (Fri)

I woke this morning with this thought on my mind. If we do not feed our physical body, it will die. It needs nourished daily (Matt 6:11). If we do not feed our spiritual body, it will also die (Alma 42:9). The signals of pang in our physical body when we do not eat are reminders of the need to nourish our spiritual body daily.

It might seem almost counter intuitive that to hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matt 5:6) may require we subdue the physical by fasting to feed the spiritual.

In other words, if the pangs of physical hunger are given to remind us to feed ourselves daily both physically and spiritually, why would there be any need to deprive ourselves of food physically to strengthen ourselves spiritually?

Stick of Joseph footnote Alma 42:13

As the Zohar says: "R. Hiya discoursed on the text: Therefore hearken unto me, ye men of understanding: Far be it from God that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity. For the work of man will he requite unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways (Job 34:10 – 11). 'God,' he said, 'in creating the world, meant it to be based on justice, and all that is done in the world would be weighed in the scales of justice, were it not that, to save the world from perishing, God screened it with mercy, which tempers pure justice and prevents it from destroying the world. The world is thus governed in mercy and thereby is able to endure'" (Zohar 1:180b).

Alma 42:13-14, 22

When you think of Christ as "the prototype of the saved man," you should also remember Christ "attained to the resurrection" by "breaking the bonds of death." Justice requires man to die. When I die, it will be deserved. The same is true for all mankind from Adam to the present. However, when Christ died it was unjust. The "wages of sin" is death, but He did not earn those wages. He never submitted to sin, and therefore the law of justice was offended by His death. Because of this, He was able to take His body up again, and the law of justice could not prevent it. Christ's death was not only unjust, but it was an eternal offense. When the life of a man who should have lived forever has been taken, what He gave up was infinite. Therefore, the price He paid was infinite. Whatever justice demanded had been satisfied, and He could then intercede for all mankind.

Alma 42:17-20

Notes from JJournal, 8 Feb 2018

Divine nature (Young Women value #2, blue)

Earlier this week i was trying to reason through the evangelical idea of salvation by grace without works.

I thought of Alma's teaching of that without punishment there is no law (Alma 42:17). It's like the rebellious teenager who the father tells not to date that boy anymore and she replies, "or else what?". How can one say that once he has been saved he no longer has any reason to fear alienation from God if he sins? Without fear of punishment we have removed an essential component of the plan.

*"And also, if there was no law given against sin men would not be afraid to sin."
(Alma 42:20)*

Then it occurred to me that teaching of being saved by grace without works strips the power of the feminine. One who is observant will be able to see in scripture a complimentary balance in the masculine and feminine aspects of the divine nature. (Notice verse 24, "justice" is referred to in the masculine and "mercy" in the feminine.)

The masculine can be constant with a good track record over time, but the feminine demands we be our best here and now, in this moment. (In Greek "grace", charis, is a feminine noun).

The idea that the feminine demands we be at our best was confirmed this morning in my reading of the Apocrypha.

At first she will walk in twists and turns with them. She will bring fear and dread upon them, and she will torture them with her discipline until she trusts them completely. She will test them with her commandments, and again she will come straight back to them, make them glad, and reveal to them her secrets. (Sirach, Ecclesiasticus 4:17-18)

And again in chapter 6:

Wisdom is rugged terrain to the uneducated, and the fainthearted won't persevere with her. She will be like a heavy stone that tests them, and they won't hesitate to throw her aside. Wisdom is like her name, and she won't be visible to many.

Listen, my child, and welcome my opinion. Don't reject my advice.

Put your feet into her shackles and your neck into her collar. Bend your shoulder down and carry her, and don't chafe at her bonds. Come to her with your whole being, and keep to her ways with all your strength. Track her down and seek her, and she will become known to you.

When you get possession of her, don't let her go. In the end, you will find rest in her, and she will turn to you and make you happy.

*Her shackles will be a strong shelter for you, and her collar will be a glorious robe.
(Sirach, Ecclesiasticus 6:20-29)*

[Alma 42:22](#)

But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God.

All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence. (D&C 93:30)

I say unto you, that the man that doeth this, the same cometh out in open rebellion against God; therefore he listeth to obey the evil spirit, and becometh an enemy to all righteousness; therefore, the Lord has no place in him, for he dwelleth not in unholy temples. (Mosiah 2:37)

Nevertheless, it is not written that there shall be no end to this torment, but it is written endless torment... For, behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore— Eternal punishment is God's punishment. Endless punishment is God's punishment. (D&C 19:6, 10-12)

Enoch introduces the idea that Man has created sin

I have sworn unto you, ye sinners, as a mountain has not become a slave, And a hill does not become the handmaid of a woman, Even so sin has not been sent upon the earth, But man of himself has created it, And under a great curse shall they fall who commit it. (1 En 98:4) (see Evernote "Odds Are We'll Be Alright)

Alma 42:24

"none but truly penitent are saved"

See also Alma 27:18 "none receive joy of God save truly penitent"

Penitent: Showing you are sorry for something you have done because you feel it was wrong. Feeling or expressing remorse for one's misdeeds or sins.

Alma 42:29-30

And now, my son, I desire that ye should let these things trouble you no more, and only let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance. O my son, I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more. Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins, by denying the justice of God; but do you let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility.

What is it that troubles us in our current state of affairs that we are dealing with now? Do these things trouble us more than our sins do?