

Book of Mormon Study – Moroni 7-9

Online zoom Sunday School, 13 Dec 2020

(goto.jayball.name/bofm)

Real Intent

Moroni 7:6-9

for if he offereth a gift, or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent it profiteth him nothing.

The Book of Mormon uniquely uses the term “real intent.” “Real intent” is required for acceptable prayer: “it [is] counted evil unto a man if he shall pray and not with real intent of heart.” (verse 9) And, to obtain the gift of the holy ghost, real intent is mandatory: “I know that if ye shall follow the Son with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ by baptism — yea, by following your Lord and Savior down into the water according to his word — behold, then shall ye receive the holy ghost.” (2 Ne 31:13)

Repentance is also dependent upon “real intent” to obtain forgiveness: “But as oft as they repented and sought forgiveness with real intent, they were forgiven.” (Moroni 6:8)

The best description of “real intent” comes from the resurrected Nephi (church tradition calls him Moroni*), who appeared to Joseph Smith and revealed the existence of a buried record. After informing Joseph of the plates and departing, Nephi returned and after repeating the same message again, he added this: “a caution to me, telling me that Satan would try to tempt me (in consequence of the indigent circumstances of my father’s family) to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich. This he forbid me, saying that I must have no other object in view in getting the plates but to glorify God, and must not be influenced by any other motive but that of building his kingdom, otherwise I could not get them.”

This is Joseph Smith’s best explanation of “real intent.” He got it from an angel.

Christ continually alluded to “real intent” as He explained His ministry: When praying for those who believed in and would follow Him: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” (John 17:20-21)

When answering a question about His Father, Christ explained: “If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him... he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” (John 14:7-10)

When praying and suffering in Gethsemene, He acknowledged His submission to the Father's will: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." (Matt 26:39)

When He defined who He was to the Nephites, His identity was tied directly to submission to the Father: "I have drank 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 Ne 11:11)

The tendency to seek our own will is evil. It is also evil to feign we cooperate with heaven, when our real desire is to get something from heaven. "Real intent" involves the authentic, complete submission to the will of Heaven because that has become your sole objective. Not to get a great reward. Not to negotiate some blessing here and now. Not to become great in the eyes of Heaven. Just to have no other object in mind than to glorify God. It is the intent to not be influenced by any other motive but building His kingdom.

Service to God mustn't be done for another desire or motive, or it is not "real intent" and is accounted as evil.

God's will should be good enough to justify seeking to do it. In the beginning it was not good enough to keep Adam and Eve awaiting the command to partake of knowledge of good and evil. Instead they acted in pursuit of something desirable to benefit them, even though it was not yet God's will for them. They acted apart from God's will. They transgressed because they rebelled.

Christ was the opposite of our first mortal parents. He acted only on His Parent's will. He acted with "real intent" in all He said, did and thought.

[Stick of Joseph footnote Moroni 7:6](#)

As we read in the Mishnah: "... all are the same, the one who offers much and the one who offers little, on condition that a man will direct his intention to Heaven" (m.Menachot 13:11).

[Stick of Joseph footnote Moroni 7:8](#)

As we read in the Talmud: "... all the charity and kindness done by the heathen is counted to them as sin, because they only do it to magnify themselves" (b.Baba Batra 10b).

[Moroni 7:12-13](#)

Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually. But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.

From Hugh Nibley:

The situation is plainly stated in Moroni 7:12 when he talks about inviteth and enticeth. Here you have them balanced. Moroni is the most instructive book in the Book of Mormon. He tells us that Satan is always inviting and enticing us in one direction. But at the same time the Lord is doing exactly the same thing; he is inviting and enticing us in the opposite direction. Who decides which direction you go in? Well, you do. The enticing and inviting are equally balanced. We allow Satan, our common enemy, [to tempt us]. Does he make himself overpoweringly persuasive so that you can't possibly resist him? In that case you haven't sinned. He's not given that power; you are given the power to resist. He can only deceive. All the power you give him, as the Book of Mormon tells us, is by deception. If you want to follow, that's why you'll do it—that's all there is to it. It's up to you to decide. We are being pulled equally in two directions. Which orbit will you be drawn into? The one you prefer.

This is psychologically sound, too. Every moment of the day the mind must pick out and focus on one particular thing. All the rest becomes background. Who decides what the mind focuses on? You select it and it's up to you. The things you wish to focus on and dwell on are the things which you choose. Talk about this life becoming a time of probation! The choices you make every minute announce where your preferences are. They make clear where you stand, what your values are, and everything else. You give yourself away every hour of the day. It's marvelous because it goes on right to the end. As Nephi tells us, God prolongs our lives so we will have more chance to repent. That's the great blessing of it. You have to make a choice. It's not just the "two ways." The ancients used to talk about the "two ways." But the way of light and the way of darkness are before us at all times. You have the choice of the one or the other, and there is no middle way because they lead in opposite directions. As Heraclitus said, "The up road and the down road are one." They lead in opposite directions. Being on the up road depends on the way you are facing, whether you are doing up or whether you are going down. To be righteous is to be facing up. You may be right at the bottom of the road and a miserable rat. To be lost, to be wicked is to be facing down, no matter how high you may be. (Hugh Nibley, Teachings of the Book of Mormon, Semester 2, BYU 1988-1990, pg 201)

Moroni 7:25

Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing; and thus it was until the coming of Christ.

And thus it was that man began to exercise faith in Christ. How does this line up with what is taught in Lecture of Faith 2:

Adam thus being made acquainted with God, communicated the knowledge which he had unto his posterity... Which laid the foundation for the exercise of their faith, (LoF 2:31)

Here's my summary of this line of thought from Lecture 2:

First, in the garden Adam had first-hand knowledge of God. He conversed with him face to face, was permitted to stand in his presence, and received instruction from Him. (Gen 2:15-17,19-20)

Second, we see that though man did transgress, his transgression did not deprive him of the previous knowledge he had. Though he was cast out from the garden of Eden, his knowledge of the existence of God was not lost, neither did God cease to manifest his will unto him. (Gen 3:8-10, 16-24)

Third, Adam communicated the knowledge which he had unto his posterity, and by this means the idea of the existence of God was first communicated to mankind. This laid the foundation for the exercise of their faith, through which they could obtain a knowledge of God's character and also of his glory. (Gen 4:1-2, 25-26, and ch 5)

This is how, in the first instance*, God became an object of faith for man (as the only being in whom faith could center for life and salvation). Also we see from this that man's testimony of God is based upon this foundation, which excited the enquiry and diligent search of the ancient saints, to seek after and obtain a knowledge of the glory of God. It was human testimony, and human testimony only, that excited this enquiry. It was the credence they gave to the testimony of their fathers that aroused their minds to enquire after the knowledge of God.

"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" (Rom 10:14-15)

* Not meaning the evidences that are manifested by the works of creation. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made: even his eternal power and Godhead." (Rom 1:20) I mean the evidences by which the first thoughts were suggested to the minds of men that there was a God who created all things.

Notice that it is through human testimony only that excites this enquiry in the first instance:

*We have now clearly set forth how it is, and how it was, that God became an object of faith for rational beings; and also, upon what foundation the testimony was based, which excited the enquiry and diligent search of the ancient saints, to seek after and obtain a knowledge of the glory of God: and we have seen that **it was human testimony, and human testimony only, that excited this enquiry, in the first instance in their minds...** (LoF 2: 56)*

Joseph Smith, in this Lectures on Faith, is discussing how in the first instance God *became an object of faith* for man. Moroni is talking about how man *began to exercise faith* in God. Notice that in addition to "every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God", Moroni says that men began to exercise faith in Christ "*by the ministering of angels*". Joseph Smith has given us this further clarification in Doctrine and Covenants:

*...there are no angels who minister to this earth but **those who do belong** or have belonged to it. (D&C 130:5)*

Angels can me mortal. How can a mortal become an angel? Might it involve speaking with the tongue of angels as Nephi talks about in 2 Ne 31:13? In the remarks about human testimony above, Joseph

referenced Rom 10:14-15. It's worth reflecting on that verse and what it means "how shall they preach, except they be sent?"

Lecture 2 concludes with this profound statement:

*we have seen that it was human testimony, and human testimony only, that excited this enquiry, in the first instance in their minds—it was the credence they gave to the testimony of their fathers—**this testimony having aroused their minds to enquire after the knowledge of God, the enquiry frequently terminated, indeed, always terminated, when rightly pursued, in the most glorious discoveries, and eternal certainty.***

Moroni 7:30

For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness.

I was impressed with this blog post from several years ago:

When I first joined the LDS Church I thought every Latter-day Saint had revelations, visitations by angels, and miracles in their lives. I thought, the Joseph Smith story was the common experience for those who were members of this Restored Church.

It took a few years before I realized that it was the exception, not the rule, that such miraculous experiences took place. I learned that most saints were more akin to Hugh Nibley's description of his grandfather, a member of the First Presidency, who said that if he ever saw an angel he would "jump out the window."

I think there is a tendency to avoid discussing any contemporary occurrence of the miraculous in our individuals lives within the Church because of the frequent association of such things with deceivers and the deceived. In contrast to that fear, Moroni affirms that angels appear only to those with "a firm mind." (Moroni 7: 30.) How odd it is that we have this juxtaposition: On the one hand, in our day it is viewed as being evidence of a weak mind, or dubious character, and on the other Moroni asserts it is evidence of a "firm mind." One or the other has to be incorrect.

I think such things are experienced less because we talk of them less. As we talk of them less, we increase our doubts about such things. Doubt and faith cannot coincide.

So was Christ weak-minded or of "a firm mind?" Was Saul of Tarsus deceived or a deceiver, or instead a godly man who received notice from heaven? What of Joseph, Alma, Moses, Peter, Mary, Elizabeth, Agabus, and John?

Today we prefer our miracles at a distance. When we do accept the occasional miracle, we want it to be separated by culture, time and reduced to written accounts from the deceased. We think it's safer that way. Society trusts that when the miraculous has been reduced to history alone it can then safely be the stuff from

which PhD's and theologians extract the real meanings. After all, our scientific society only trusts education, certification and licensing; not revelation, visitation and ministering of angels. Well, even if that is not as it should be, it is at least as Nephi said it would be: "They deny the power of God, the Holy One of Israel; and they say unto the people: Harken unto us, and hear ye our precept; for behold there is no God today, for the Lord and the Redeemer hath done his work, and he hath given his power unto men. Behold, hearken ye unto my precept; if they shall say there is a miracle wrought by the hand of the Lord, believe it not; for this day he is not a God of miracles; he hath done his work." (2 Nephi 28: 5-6.) (Denver Snuffer, Jumping out a Window, 24 Feb 2010, <https://denversnuffer.com/2010/02/jumping-out-a-window/>)

To seek miracles or not?

Joseph Smith said "Because faith is wanting, the fruits are. No man since the world was had faith without having something along with it... A man who has none of the gifts has no faith" (TPJS pg 270) Should we seek gifts? Is this the same as seeking signs?

The key here is to seek *faith* - or in other words signs *follow* them that believe (D&C 63:9). Not the other way around.

During the early Kirtland era when there were a lot of false spirits that wound up creating a lot of mischief, the people were really wanting to have these miraculous signs to be given. Faith does not come from signs. It's actually impossible that as a consequence of the sign, for you to now have faith. It doesn't work that way. That's one of the reasons why Christ, when He did something miraculous like healing someone who was a leper or healing someone who was lame, He would admonish them, "Don't tell anyone about this." Because if the person who underwent this miraculous event went out and talked it up, then the people who heard that would be damaged in their ability to have faith. Because they now had a sign. And if what you do is run after signs, then you go from sign to sign, and you never develop the required faith.

By studying the scriptures and plumbing the depths of the message that we have in the scripture record that's in front of us, you can arrive at a point in your understanding in which it really doesn't matter if an angel appears to you or not. The angel's purpose is never going to be to produce faith in you. If the angel is going to produce faith in you because of their appearance, then the angel ought not appear. Because they'll turn you into a sign seeker. On the other hand, if you have developed faith by the careful study of what we've been given in the scriptures, and the presence or absence of an angel will have no effect on your faith—you will believe; you will have confidence; your understanding reaches the same depth with or without the angels presence—then there is no reason for the angel to withhold. There is no reason for him not to appear.

Christ said to tell no one because it would attract the wrong kind of follower. It would attract the adulterers. It would attract the *sign seekers*. It would attract the wrong kind of people. Satan tempted Christ asking him for signs that were self-serving. Bread for the Lord to eat when the Lord was hungry. A show of angelic support when he would be cast off the Temple's pinnacle. At his death, the wicked demanded signs from him. Spare yourself from the crucifixion; heal yourself. Signs are by their very nature self-serving and attention grabbing, and it is just inevitable. They attract followers, and the Jews knew this and feared Christ's miracles would result in him becoming greatly popular.

*Then many of the Jews who came to Mary and had **seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him**. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees and told them what things Jesus had done. Then gathered the chief priests and Pharisees a council, and said, What shall we do? For **this man does many miracles. If we let him alone, all men will believe on him**, and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. (John 11:45-48; emphasis added)*

But these would be the wrong kind of follower. The gentiles crave that sort of thing. Gentiles who try to get a sign to follow do so because their hearts are wrong. Signs follow faith. Signs follow faith by the will of God, not of man. From the Teachings and Commandments: And these signs shall follow them that believe: in my name they shall do many wonderful works (D&C 84:65-66)

From Christian radio broadcast that I listened to a few years ago (Thu 8 Sep 2016, about 11:45am) From His Heart Ministries (FromHisHeart.org) message by pastor Jeff Schreve of First Baptist Church, Texarkana, Texas.

(transcription may not be entirely accurate, I transcribed it myself because I didn't want to pay \$2 to download)

I just don't know if he's able. I'm bringing my need before him but I don't know if he is willing. I want him to be willing and I want him to do this, but I've been asking him for weeks and months and years. And I'm not getting an answer. Why doesn't he do what he did back then? You know, that's a legit question. It's a good question. The disciples prayed, in the early parts of Acts and Acts chapter 4 after they were threatened by the Sanhedrin, "don't speak any more in the name of Jesus." They prayed and they asked the Lord to give them boldness so they could speak in the name of Jesus, and they said "Lord, grant that your servants speak with boldness and Lord stretch forth your hand to heal. And do signs and wonders and miracles in our midst." Man I think that's a great prayer. I pray that prayer, but here's the truth. You see lots of miracles, just re-pleat with miracles in the 3-1/2 years of Jesus' ministry, you see lots of miracles in the early stages of the book of acts, and then the miracles start to wane. Doesn't mean God doesn't do miracles, he still does miracles, but it wasn't quite like it was. Why is that? Because the Lord uses miracles to authenticate the message. Jesus never did a miracle for a miracle's sake. His miracles always had a meaning. And/When he did a miracle to authenticate the message. And once the message was authenticated, the need for miracles or external miracles wasn't needed near what it was. [reference Mormon 9:15-20, Moroni 7:27, 2 Nephi 28: 5-6] How do I know that? Well the apostle Paul, whom God used...

Jeff goes on to recount Paul's miracle of bringing man back to life who died falling out the window. Then had to endure a thorn in the flesh that God did not remove from Paul because God said "my grace is sufficient for you".

Then he relates powerful story of Katherine Marshall, married to Peter Marshall, Chaplain of the senate in the 40's in America. From her book, *Beyond Ourselves* she relates her story. In 1942-1943 she became ill with a lung infection for 6 months. Prayed for God to heal her and nothing was happening. One afternoon she read the story of a missionary who had been an invalid for 8 years. Constantly this missionary prayed that God would make her well that she might do his work. Finally she was worn out with her futile petition and she prayed this prayer, "Alright. I give up. If you want me to be an invalid,

that's your business. Anyway, I want you even more than I want my health. You decide Lord." And in 2 weeks the woman was out of bed and was completely well. Kathrine Marshall said that spoke to her heart. So Kathrine spoke a similar prayer. Tears began to flow. She said, "I had no faith as I understood faith. I expected nothing and the gift of my sick self was made with no trace of graciousness." She just let it out there. "God if this is what you want, if this is your will for me, alright, Lord." It was what she titled the prayer of relinquishment. The result was as if she had touched a button that opened the windows of heaven. As if some dynamo of heavenly power began flowing within a few hours I experienced the presence of the living Christ in a way that wiped away any doubt and revolutionized my life and from that moment my recovery began. She goes on to say this, "through this incident God was trying to teach me something important about prayer. A demanding spirit with self will as it's rudder blocks prayer. God refuses to violate our free will. And unless free will is voluntarily given up God cannot move to answer that prayer."

Moroni 7:40

And again, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope?

Hope. We've talked about this. Faith and hope work together. They seem to build on each other in steps of degrees as we progress.

Moroni 7:46-47

President Uchtdorf wrote a First Presidency message on these verses in 2016. At the time I was home teacher to the bishop. I posted my home teaching message on my blog:

I was reading the First Presidency Message for September [2016] preparing for my Home teaching lesson this month. Something about it made me read it several times before I could put my finger on what befogged me about it...

Uchtdorf's message implies that feeling compassion and love for others and declaring our love for God is what entails charity, the pure love of Christ (referencing Moroni 7:46-47), and then asks what do we do after that?

I believe that the charity Moroni is speaking of is more than a declaration of our love for God. It's more than our feelings of compassion and love for others. When Moroni implores for us to "pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that we may be filled with this love" (v 48), he is telling us that this is a love that is bestowed upon true followers of Christ that they may become "sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him." In other words, this is a gift bestowed by God, not a simple declaration from our mouth that we possess it.

Moroni teaches us that our obligation to God is to exercise faith (v 37-39), that we may obtain a hope in Christ (v 40-43), so that we may become possessors of charity, a pure love of Christ (v 44-48), a fruit sweet and who's beauty and whiteness exceeds the whiteness of the driven snow (1 Ne 8:11; 11:8) which is the greatest of the gifts of God (1 Ne 15:36). Moroni's emphasis is on meekness (v 39, 43-44) which does not

assume we are already in possession of something we should be prayerfully seeking with all the energy of our hearts. (Jay's blog, After Love, Then What?, 8 Sep 2016, <http://jayball.name/198/after-love-then-what/>)

Moroni 8:2

My beloved son, Moroni, I rejoice exceedingly that your Lord Jesus Christ hath been mindful of you, and hath called you to his ministry, and to his holy work.

What does it mean to be called to the ministry by Christ? We make the assumption that when a bishop calls someone as the Ward Mission Leader that this person has now been called to the ministry by Christ. Is this the same thing that Mormon is talking about here in reference to his son Moroni? Can it have something to do with speaking with the tongue of angels as Nephi mentions in 2 Ne 31:13?

Moroni 8:8

the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them;

Jacob 6:6 why will ye die?

Stick of Joseph footnote Moroni 8:8

law of circumcision: The seventh rule of Hillel tells us that a passage must be understood in context, and the fifth rule of Hillel tells us that general statements and specific statements must be understood in context of one another. The general subject of this section of text deals with the principle that children below the age of accountability are not culpable to Elohim in regards to Torah observance. Moreover the "law of circumcision" is incumbent, not upon an infant, but upon a parent. "Wherefore, little children...are not capable of committing sin. Wherefore, the curse of Adam is taken away from them in me, that it has no power over them." The "law of circumcision" is given as a specific example of this principle. In other words, a child below the age of accountability is not culpable to Elohim in regards to the law of circumcision.

Moroni 8:11

Behold, baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins.

John's baptism was called "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." (Mark 1:4, NIV).

"Peter replied, 'Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'" (Acts 2:38 NLT)

Evangelical Christians teach that baptism is an important step of obedience in the believer's life, yet only an acknowledgment of the salvation experience already accomplished - that baptism itself has no power to cleanse or save from sin. In defense of this teaching, Moroni, Mark, and Luke, do not say that baptism

has power to cleanse or save from sin. But the scriptures do clearly teach that baptism is a requirement "unto repentance to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins."

That there has risen a belief that little children need baptism gives evidence that the original reason for baptism is founded in a belief that it is a requirement for salvation.

Mormon describe the practice of baptizing little children as a "sole mockery" (v 9) and "awful wickedness" (v 19).

The evangelical Christian argument against baptism being required is similar to what we discussed last week in the necessity for virtue in authority. The need for a person to live virtuously or be worthy of office in order to exercise priesthood or claim authority from God. Both are an argument against the need to live virtuously. We want to excuse the necessity... Because we all make mistakes, everyone is flawed, God loves us anyway, so keep your priesthood, it doesn't matter to live virtuously to have priesthood. It doesn't matter if you don't live virtuously in order to be saved. It's a similar train of thought, and it is profoundly false doctrine.

Moroni 8:25

And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins;

Contrary to what Evangelical Christianity teaches, it is "the fulfilling the commandments [that] bringeth remission of sins".

Moroni 8:28

Pray for them, my son, that repentance may come unto them. But behold, I fear lest the Spirit hath ceased striving with them;

We discussed this in earlier lessons. See lesson on Mosiah 1-3 under heading "God Sustains Us" and lesson on Alma 23-29 under heading "Wicked Destroy Wicked and Righteous ". It comes up again here. (also again 6 verses later in :4).

Moroni 9:6

And now, my beloved son, notwithstanding their hardness, let us labor diligently; for if we should cease to labor, we should be brought under condemnation; for we have a labor to perform whilst in this tabernacle of clay, that we may conquer the enemy of all righteousness, and rest our souls in the kingdom of God.

Despite that the spirit has ceased striving with them, despite they are lost and fallen and their case is hopeless. Despite that my prayers for them are without faith (see Morm 3:12). This is a message that comes up in the hymn Press Forward Saints first and last verse.

Moroni 9:9

For behold, many of the daughters of the Lamanites have they taken prisoners; and after depriving them of that which was most dear and precious above all things, which is chastity and virtue

How much stress (or detractors might say, damage) has this verse caused to young women who have been raped? This is one of those verses that has given rise to much discussion and controversy. Young women in such a situation have taken this verse as something to heap additional fodder to feel worthless. As if being a victim isn't bad enough. Is the wording messed up in this verse, is our interpretation wrong?

* Moroni or Nephi? I don't have time to parse this subject into my own words, so I will reference this discussion found on MormonThink with a disclaimer that it contains anti-mormon material. Despite the traditional LDS view, I remain convinced that the true identity of the angel was actually Nephi.

<http://www.mormonthink.com/nephiweb.htm>