

Book of Mormon Study – Moroni 10

Online zoom Sunday School, 20 Dec 2020

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Moroni 10:1

I write unto my brethren, the Lamanites

As we noted two lessons ago in Moroni chapter 1, "*I write a few more things, that perhaps they may be of worth unto my brethren, the Lamanites, in some future day*". The gentiles are not mentioned.

Stick of Joseph footnote Moroni 10:3

ponder it in your hearts: M'roni's admonition to "ponder" the "wisdom" of The Stick of Joseph parallels the process described by the Rebbe Zalman in the Tanya, whereby the wisdom of the Word of Elohim gestates in our understanding to produce a testimony through an awe and a love for Elohim "like burning coals, with a passion" for His Word. We read in the Tanya: "The intellect of the rational soul, which is the faculty that conceives any thing, is given the appellation of chochmah [wisdom]... when [a person] cogitates with his intellect in order to understand a thing truly and profoundly as it evolves from the concept which he has conceived in his intellect, this is called binah [understanding]. These [chochmah and binah] are the very 'father' and 'mother' which give birth to love of G-d, and awe and dread of Him. For when the intellect in the rational soul deeply contemplates and immerses itself exceedingly in the greatness of G-d, how He fills all worlds and encompasses all worlds, and in the presence of Whom everything is considered as nothing — there will be born and aroused in his mind and thought the emotion of awe for the Divine Majesty, to fear and be humble before His blessed greatness, which is without end or limit, and to have the dread of G-d in his heart. Next, his heart will glow with an intense love, like burning coals, with a passion, desire and longing, and a yearning soul, towards the greatness of the blessed Eyn Sof. This constitutes the culminating passion of the soul, of which Scripture speaks, as 'My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth...' and 'My soul thirsteth for G-d...' and 'My soul thirsteth for Thee...'" (Tanya; Likutei Amarim Chapter 3).

Stick of Joseph footnote Moroni 10:4

The "if...and" conditional structure seems stilted in English, which prefers "if...then." However, in Hebrew, this construction is correct. Its appearance here and elsewhere in the text indicates the Hebraic nature of the underlying original.

Moroni 10:5

And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.

This verse requires us to consider the role and value of the Holy Ghost. Does it really have the capacity to reveal all truth? If so, how do we get it? It's worth taking some time to compare the simple formula for receiving light and truth by obedience to the Gospel, with the learning, wisdom, and theology of

men. Everyone is entitled to receive light and truth if they will connect with God through the spirit. Acquiring the wisdoms and theologies of men requires something different. The learning of men uses a different set of methods, employs a different vocabulary and requires men to be credentialed.

Acquiring knowledge of "all things" through the Holy Spirit is not something Latter day Saint intellectuals defend as a possibility. Only the scriptures and the prophets try to get us to see this message.

In these few words Moroni tells us the way mankind is offered wisdom from God. Through the Holy Ghost, we first receive "power," and then we acquire truth. Receiving "power," holds profound implications. Priestly authority allows ordinances to be performed, and sealings to take place, but it is the power of the Holy Ghost which ratifies the ordinances (D&C 121:37) and confirms the sealings (D&C 132:7). There is no authority of any kind (priestly or otherwise) if there is no corresponding empowerment by the Holy Ghost. The way in which the Historic Christian church resolved the Donatist controversy was wrong (see notes about this from our earlier lesson on Moroni 1-6 two weeks ago). No man's ordination to priestly authority is immutable. The restoration of the Gospel was needed because the wickedness of ancient priestly officiators resulted in forfeiture of priestly authority. And, within the ranks of those ordained in this new Dispensation, priestly authority can be and is lost when men do not continually repent and live in conformity with God's commandments.

The power of the Holy Ghost is the power of intelligence. From it comes revelation and understanding. Men's minds are quickened and they can know the truth of anything. As Joseph Smith described it:

"[T]he Holy Ghost, the same as given on the day of Pentecost, and that all Saints receive after faith, repentance, and baptism. This first Comforter or Holy Ghost has no other effect than pure intelligence. It is more powerful in expanding the mind, enlightening the understanding, and storing the intellect with present knowledge, ..."
(DHC 3:380.)

Elsewhere Joseph said:

"No man can receive the Holy Ghost without receiving revelations. The Holy Ghost is a revelator." (DHC 6:58)

Perhaps Joseph's greatest comment on the power of the Holy Ghost to make known all truth to a person came at the very end of his ministry. Just a few weeks prior to his death, Joseph made this comment:

"I am learned, and know more than all the world put together. The Holy Ghost does, anyhow, and He is within me, and comprehends more than all the world: and I will associate myself with Him." (DHC 6:308 and also TPJS p. 350)

By the second century the gifts of the Spirit began to wane, and the spread of Christianity came to depend upon the persuasiveness of oratory and rhetoric. Instead of obedience, argument and reasoning were expected to justify and buttress "faith" in Christianity. A Hellenized world required translation of Christianity into a different vocabulary which would fit into the learning of the Greeks.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the profound differences is to contrast the vocabulary of scripture with the vocabulary of the theologians.

From an email sent to local pastor Eli Brayley, 22 Sep 2017:

The authors of the New Testament were simple folk. Farmers, tradesmen, fishermen, merchants, tentmakers, and common men called to Divine responsibilities. The simple language they found sufficient to describe the things they saw and heard and understood included words we find in the bible like...

Faith / faithful

Hope / hopeful

Charity

Repentance / repent

Obedience / obey

Love

Compassion / compassionate

Shalt

Shalt not

Do

Will

Know

Believe

etc.

Compare this to the commonly used vocabulary of theologians (which to common folk must include some definition for their meaning to become clear)...

Forensic - to be used in a legal debate

Soteriology - the way of salvation

Cosmology - the understanding of explanation for creation or the universe.

Etymology / etymological - the origin of a word

Orthodoxy - the established or accepted doctrine

Anthropomorphism - like man in form; i.e., the attempt to rationalize the use of human elements in descriptions of God.

Ontological - an explanation or theory of the nature of existence.

etc.

Although these words were not necessary for the Primitive Church, nor used in scripture, they are crucial terms to be able to communicate in the language used to define the doctrines and creeds of Historic Christianity.

*In an article titled *What Really Happened at Nicea?*, James R. White from the Christian Research Institute (<http://www.equip.org/article/what-really-happened-at-nicea/>) makes what to me is an interesting admission as he labors to defend the Nicene Creed.*

He explains that "every time they came up with a statement that was limited solely to biblical terms" it was unclear. They invented and used new terminology because "they needed to use a term that could not be misunderstood." Meaning that they had to go outside the scriptures because the scriptures failed to say what they wanted said.

He elaborates that "they sought to clarify biblical truth." Here it seems he does not want to admit their extra-biblical creed was a departure, and struggles to claim the council was only accomplishing a limited and clarifying task.

There are emerging voices in Mormonism which cry out for development of a theology. One such effort has been undertaken by Sterling McMurrin. His book titled *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2000, is perhaps the most obvious effort to supply a theology for the faith he loved, but like Augustine, could not accept in its primitive form. His famous quip that 'you don't get books from angels and translate them by miracles; it is just that simple' underlies his skepticism of the whole revelatory process.

Just as faith originates through asking to know if the Book of Mormon is true, so also faith develops through seeking the Holy Ghosts' direction in all things. "By the power of the Holy Ghost you may know the truth of *all things* means more than merely the incipient faith to accept the Book of Mormon. It means the Holy Ghost is capable of imparting intelligence about the whole breadth and width of *all things*.

This process works. It requires obedience to unlock it. It does not require theological arguments or the vocabulary of the philosopher. In large measure, such things detract from the process. God's voice was meant to be heard by all who follow Him. But He insists upon us receiving His voice on the conditions He has established. None of us can gain it otherwise.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. (John 10:1)

We cannot rob God. Nor can we pretend to any real knowledge about Him when it is gained only through theological argument and Neo-Platonic epistemology. If our hearts do not know Him, then our mind's arguments and rationalizations are meaningless.

Even those who receive angels, part the veil, and have an audience with Christ must rely on the Holy Ghost as the primary source of inspiration. There are limits to how frequently angels can visit. The veil parts only occasionally, even for those for whom it parts at all. However, the Holy Ghost can be a constant companion to anyone who seeks for it. The companionship guides, instructs, clarifies, and imparts pure knowledge to those willing to accept what is offered.

Stick of Joseph footnote Moroni 10:8 references 3 Ne 29: 5-9

Yea, wo unto him that shall deny the revelations of the Lord, and that shall say the Lord no longer worketh by revelation, or by prophecy, or by gifts, or by tongues, or by healings, or by the power of the Holy Ghost! Yea, and wo unto him that shall say at that day, to get gain, that there can be no miracle wrought by Jesus Christ; (3 Ne 29:6-7)

Who would stand to get gain by saying such things?

Gifts

Moroni 10:8-19

Moroni sandwiches gifts in verses 8-19 between his discussion about faith. As Joseph noted (see Moroni 10:20-22 below), these things are tied together.

Moroni 10:9-10

For behold, to one is given by the Spirit of God, that he may teach the word of wisdom; And to another, that he may teach the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

What is the difference between teaching the word of wisdom or the word of knowledge?

Moroni 10:18

And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ.

Impressive list of gifts. Compare with list of gifts given in D&C 46:10-26 and 1 Corinthians 12:7-11.

Is there a tendency to justify not asking for a particular gift because that's simply just not my gift. To some is given to have great faith, but I don't feel like that's me. Shouldn't we desire and be praying for these gifts? Hugh Nibley spoke about how everyone desires gift to be healed when they're sick, but beyond that it seems we simply have no further interest in the other gifts.

Some have a gift for things, others of us may have to work harder at it, but it can nonetheless be ours if we ask for it and are willing to put forth the required effort.

Gifts can be used for good or bad. But the source of gifts still come from Christ. Just as God sustains us moment to moment (Mosiah 2:21) even in evil deeds, the gifts Christ gives us can be used for ill.

Moroni 10:20-22

Is this the same message, or a continuation of the same message from previous chapters (particularly 7)? He talks about gifts - brings us back to Joseph Smith's statement from last week, "*A man who has none of the gifts has no faith*". Moroni continues by talking again about faith, hope and charity. Does the repetition of this subject indicate the significance of these things? Is he telling us something new about these things that we didn't catch the first time? Are Lamanites more inclined to "get it" (since this is being addressed to them)?

Moroni 10:22

And if ye have no hope ye must needs be in despair; and despair cometh because of iniquity.

If I want to solve my despair problem (or avoid the despair that will inevitably come when my world begins to unravel), then I must obtain hope - or a promise from God.

If you don't have faith, you can't be saved. Faith, hope, and charity are conditions for salvation.

Moroni 10:23

And Christ truly said unto our fathers: If ye have faith ye can do all things which are expedient unto me.

We are not given the source of this quote from Christ, though Mormon appears to be referencing this same source when he quoted it earlier in Moroni 7:33.

We know it is consistent with what Christ taught in Jerusalem:

Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. (Mark 9:23)

And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. (Matt 21:20-22)

We received similar words through Joseph Smith:

Whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name it shall be given unto you, that is expedient for you; (D&C 88:64)

And then this warning is added:

And if ye ask anything that is not expedient for you, it shall turn unto your condemnation.

What IS expedient to ask for includes the gifts that Moroni has just been telling us about.

Moroni 10:24

And now I speak unto all the ends of the earth—that if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you, it shall be because of unbelief.

At this point Moroni expands his audience from "*my bretheren, the Lamanites*" to now include "*all the ends of the earth*".

As used in the Book of Mormon, almost without exception **unbelief** means one does not understand and has not accepted true doctrine. (See e.g. Mos 26:3, Alm 32:28, Hel 6:34, Mor 7:37). The word unbelief means to accept false doctrine or to have an incomplete and inaccurate understanding of correct doctrine. Unbelief is often used in conjunction with losing truth, forsaking doctrine, and "dwindling." The phrase dwindling in unbelief is the Book of Mormon's way to describe moving from a state of belief, with true and complete doctrine, to a state of unbelief, where the truth has been discarded. Miracles end because men dwindle in unbelief.

Moroni 10:27

And I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God;

Suddenly (Speedily, Quickly): Surprisingly; in an unexpected way; being caught off-guard. "I declared what I was going to do, I did it, and you got caught off-guard." (See e.g., Isaiah 17:1. RE)

Moroni 10:30

...touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing.

What is the evil gift? (Stick of Joseph footnote references Isa 52:11)

Moroni 10:32-33

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness, and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God. And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.

If by the grace of God you are perfect in Christ. How do you become perfect in Christ, by His grace? And is that meant (or possible) in this life? Is this "perfection" that Moroni is talking about here, possible? When Christ says be ye therefor perfect, which is a commandment, and Joseph Smith says (in LoF 5:2):

But notwithstanding all this, he [Christ] kept the law of God and remained without sin, showing thereby that it is in the power of man to keep the law and remain also without sin. (LoF 5:2)

To suggest that it's impossible to become perfect in this life is to deny what the scriptures are telling us.

The Lord does not expect perfection from us at this point in our eternal progression. But He does expect us to become increasingly pure. Daily repentance is the pathway to purity, and purity brings power. (President Russell M. Nelson, We Can Do Better and Be Better, April 2019 General Conference)

From my journal, 20 Sep 2019:

Last night was our evening bi-weekly stake Book of Mormon class with Marcus Reed. The topic was Repentance and Forgiveness. There was some good discussion. Joseph Smith's quote "Repentance is a thing that cannot be trifled with every day. Daily transgression and daily repentance is not that which is pleasing in the sight of God." (TPJS, pg 148) was contrasted with President Nelson's recent conference talk where he admonished the saints about our need for daily repentance. One lady in the class

expressed confusion. One brother commented that he can reconcile this by accepting President Nelson's counsel over Joseph Smith's because he is the current prophet.

Perfection

The process of cooperating with God. People don't need to "accomplish something"; they only need to get their hearts right. Once their hearts are right, everything else follows in the ordinary course. In any event, life is not the time to enjoy exaltation; that comes later. Life is the time to overcome vanity, pride, and selfishness. It is the time to lose oneself. When one does that, it doesn't matter that he still has a great gulf between himself and perfection; he is, nonetheless, perfect. Submission is perfect. However, there is still a great work ahead of everyone seeking to attain exaltation. This life's agenda is very limited, even though the full effort involved will last many lifetimes. Men and women are not here to "get exalted." They are here to continue progression which began a long time before their current birth. At this moment, they are being "added upon" by what they experience here. At some point, they will have received what they need in this sphere and will be able to move on to the next stage of development. When they have gained everything they need from this life, they will have received "the fullness" from God. It is called "the fullness" because it is all that can be obtained here. It is not possible, however, to inherit everything God ultimately offers while here. For that, it will require a great work "even beyond the grave," as Joseph put it. Indeed, it isn't even possible to fully understand God while here in this life.

Therefore, I would that ye should be perfect, even as I or your Father who is in Heaven is perfect (3 Nephi 12:48). In the Matthew text, Christ unequivocally limited this to His Father (see Matthew 5:48); here, "perfection" is achieved by both Christ and His Father. Assuming the Matthew text is correct, the difference is significant. It is another confirmation that anyone who is mortal, including the Lord, stands in jeopardy every hour (see 1 Corinthians 15:30). He simply could not claim perfection while in mortality because mortality is a time of change, challenge, and temptation. After all, He was tempted while mortal, just as every human soul is tempted (see Hebrews 4:15). Though He chose to give no heed to it, He was nevertheless tempted (see D&C 20:22). While mortal, He looked to the Father in all things (see John 5:30). After concluding His time in mortality and achieving the resurrection of the dead, He was given all power in Heaven and on Earth (see Matthew 28:18). Therefore, if the Matthew text is correct and the differences are accounted for, then the admonition of Christ for one's own perfection is not just an earthly endeavor. It is an invitation to follow Him and His Father into a loftier state, as well (see Abraham 3:26), one where the final realization will come only as one is able to endure greater glory than a mortal may possess (see Moses 1:2,5). It is good to know this commandment is possible to accomplish (see 1 Nephi 3:7). It is hard to conceive of following the Son in this way. Yet it is He who pronounced it and He who has promised to share the throne of His Father with all who will come to Him (see Revelation 3:21).

"A harmonious symmetry of light, majesty, holiness, glory, and power are all around Him who is perfection. When I read the admonition to [be ye therefore] perfect, even as I or your Father who is in Heaven is perfect (3 Nephi 12:48), I can hardly grasp how that gulf between us could be bridged. I understand about the Lord's atonement. I have certainly been the beneficiary of it and will continue to be so. When I consider the infinite gulf between His and His Father's perfection, and my own imperfection, I am left completely stupefied at the idea it is even possible. Nevertheless, He gives no

command which He does not provide means to obey.... He provides the means, and His Father ordained the laws by which it can be done, and they provide us with free will and the capacity to choose, but we must choose. We must accept. We must press forward holding Their hands in order to arrive at last, after an infinitely long journey, in the courts of Heaven itself, fit to reside there. Be ye therefore perfect. And start on that this moment. For you haven't another moment to spare."

The word "perfect," as used in the New Testament, comes from the Latin Vulgate perfectus, meaning "complete, finished" and is a translation of the Greek teleios (τέλειος), which means: "having attained the end, complete, perfect, full-grown, mature, initiated into the mystic rites, the initiate, consecrated, having finished the course, etc."* and can be interpreted ritually as completing the ascent. "The word perfect (teleios) does not mean perfect digestion, perfect eyesight, perfect memory, and so on; it is a special word meaning keeping the whole law." (Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, 438) "In a ritual setting, among the connotations of this word, this term refers to preparing a person to be presented before God 'in priestly action' Early Christians continued to use this word in this way in connection with their sacraments and their ordinances. Hugh Nibley saw that the meaning of the word teleios is namely 'living up to an agreement or covenant without fault: as the Father keeps the covenants he makes with us...the completely initiated who has both qualified for initiation and completed it is teleios, literally "gone all the way," fulfilling all requirements, every last provision of God's command.'" (John Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 118; 118n115.)

* Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), s.v. "τέλειος," 816–818. See also Strong's Concordance, G5046.