



Type: Magazine Article

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Source: *The Instructor*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (March 1948), pp. 112-116, 131

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The Book of Mormon — A Guide to Religious Living

LOWELL L. BENNION

III. IN PRAISE OF GOD

NEARLY 2000 years ago, Jesus taught a great truth which even today we are slow to remember and to practice. Before Him, Amos and his successors in the prophetic calling, and after Him, Paul and John also stressed the same truth. It was epitomized by the Savior in his reply to the lawyer's question: "Master, which is the great commandment?"

"... Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

"This is the first and great commandment.

"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."
(Matt. 22:37-40.)

No man can worship or serve the Lord acceptably if he hates his brother or deals unjustly and unmercifully with him. Our prayers are vain, our words of praise become "as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal," and our offerings will not be accepted of the Lord, if we do not also deal righteously in all of our relations with

fellowmen. Such is one of the paramount themes of Jesus and the Prophets.

With this religious teaching, Book of Mormon writers are in complete accord, as witnessed by the words of King Benjamin in his farewell address to his people:

"Behold, I say unto you that because I said unto you that I had spent my days in your service, I do not desire to boast, for I have only been in the service of God.

"And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellowbeings ye are only in the service of your God." (Mosiah 2:16, 17.)

This near-identity of the two great commandments has found hearty acceptance among Latter-day Saints. Much of our effort points to love of God through service to fellowmen. Think of our missionary labors, welfare program, and voluntary service in the Church. Indeed, many members of the Church worship the Lord largely as tools seeking to help realize His purposes among the children of men. This is praiseworthy.

While love of neighbor is a won-

derful way to love God, we should also remember that it is not the only way. The second great commandment is like unto the first but not identical with it. The fullest religious life is not to be attained by keeping the second commandment only. To love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our minds includes love of neighbor but also much more. Love of God has many roots in one's life and likewise can be expressed in many ways. The Book of Mormon, with all of its compassion for man, also teaches us, in its own original way, how to realize more fully our love of God.

Obedience

Father Lehi declares a basic relationship between man and his Maker—that of obedience.

"Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise, that inasmuch as those whom the Lord God shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land; and they shall be kept from all other nations, that they may possess this land unto themselves. And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance; and they shall dwell safely forever. (2 Nephi 1:9.) Obedience to the Lord means conformity to His laws and purposes. Since we live in a universe of law and order, obedience is essential to

the religious and moral life. Without it the religious life may be little more than sentiment and may be confusing and frustrating.

On the other hand, to love the Lord God with all one's heart, soul, and mind, one must do more than obey. Love is greater than obedience; it will include the latter but also much more. Obedience by itself may be quite matter-of-fact and even selfish and calculating. Love is unselfish, oriented with warm and rich feeling to the object of one's love. "Love lends wings to the soul" in the words of Romain Rolland. It lends deep and joyous satisfaction to one's relationship with God.

Book of Mormon writers do not stop with obedience. They loved the Lord, sensed a deep gratitude towards Him; stood in awe, reverence, and humility before Him; and sometimes burst forth in songs and expressions of praise and adoration of Him. Father Lehi was the first to exult in the Lord—

"... Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth; and, because thou art merciful, thou wilt not suffer those who come unto thee that they shall perish!

"And after this manner was the language of my father in the praising of his God; for his soul did rejoice and his whole heart was filled, because of the things which he had seen, yea, which the Lord

had shown unto him." (1 Nephi 1:14, 15.)

Nephi's Psalm

Lehi's last words were a plea to his sons to be true to the commandments of the Lord that peace might abide in the land. Upon his death, the burden of leadership for the right fell upon the youthful shoulders of Nephi. Knowing full well the character of his older and rebellious brothers, Laman and Lemuel, the full realization of his task lay heavily upon his mind and heart. In such a setting and mood, Nephi breaks forth into a song, one of the most beautiful and Psalm-like passages in the entire Book of Mormon. (Read 2 Nephi, chapter 4, from which we quote a few passages.)

"Behold, my soul delighteth in the things of the Lord; and my heart pondereth continually upon the things which I have seen and heard.

"My God hath been my support; he hath led me through mine afflictions in the wilderness; and he hath preserved me upon the waters of the great deep.

He hath filled me with his love, even unto the consuming of my flesh.

"He hath confounded mine enemies, unto the causing of them to quake before me.

"Behold, he hath heard my cry by day, and he hath given me knowledge by visions in the nighttime.

"O then, if I have seen so great

things, if the Lord in his condescension unto the children of men hath visited men in so much mercy, why should my heart weep and my soul linger in the valley of sorrow, and my flesh waste away, and my strength slacken, because of mine afflictions?

"Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul.

"Do not anger again because of mine enemies. Do not slacken my strength because of mine afflictions.

"Rejoice, O my heart, and cry unto the Lord, and say: O Lord, I will praise thee forever; yea, my soul will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation.

"O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh; for I know that cursed is he that putteth his trust in the arm of flesh. Yea, cursed is he that putteth his trust in man or maketh flesh his arm.

"Yea, I know that God will give liberally to him that asketh. Yea, my God will give me, if I ask not amiss; therefore I will lift up my voice unto thee; yea, I will cry unto thee, my God, the rock of my righteousness. Behold, my voice shall forever ascend up unto thee, my rock and mine everlasting God. Amen." (2 Nephi 4:16, 20-23, 26, 28-30, 34, 35.)

Benjamin's Humility and Gratitude

Old King Benjamin mustered his last strength to deliver a sermon to

his people. It is filled to overflowing with faith in the brotherhood of man and with the love of God. As one reads it in Mosiah, chapters 2-4, one senses the deep humility and gratitude felt by this good king.

"Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has all wisdom, and all power, both in heaven and in earth; believe that man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend.

"And again, believe that ye must repent of your sins and forsake them, and humble yourselves before God; and ask in sincerity of heart that he would forgive you; and now, if you believe all these things see that ye do them." (Mosiah 4:9, 10.)

That "Man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend," was made clear to Job (in chapters 38-41) and also in the following passage from Isaiah.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8, 9.)

Man, in his pursuit of land-titles, houses, automobiles, and untold numbers of man-made gadgets sometimes forgets that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." Mosiah brings us back rather sharply to a realization of how much we owe to our Creator.

"I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice, and has granted that ye should live in peace one with another—

"I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move and do according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another—I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants.

"And now, in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him.

"And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast?

"And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay, Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were created of the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you." (Mosiah 2:20, 21, 23-25.)

Alma's Counsel to his Son

Alma, the younger, whose soul had been racked by the torment of

hell and who had also known the joy of repentance and forgiveness, gave this counsel to his beloved son, Helaman:

"Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever.

"Counsel with the Lord in all thy doings, and he will direct thee for good; yea, when thou liest down at night lie down unto the Lord, that he may watch over you in your sleep; and when thou risest in the morning let thy heart be full of thanks unto God; and if ye do these things, ye shall be lifted up at the last day." (Alma 37:36, 37.)

Doubtless Alma had learned that to direct one's thought to the Lord, and to love Him with all one's heart, would give man the ability to love his neighbor—would lift him above all greed, selfishness, and envy making room for true brotherly love. To love one's neighbor is a sure way to love God and to love God is a sure way to prepare the mind and heart to truly love one's neighbor.

Love of Righteousness

Love of God means not only love of man but also love of everything for which the Lord stands—love of truth, freedom, justice, mercy and goodness. Book of Mormon writers understood this as they identify our relationship to these things with our relationship to Him.

"And behold, I say unto you that if ye do this ye shall always rejoice, and be filled with the love of God, and always retain a remission of your sins; and ye shall grow in the knowledge of the glory of him that created you, *or in the knowledge of that which is just and true.*" (Mosiah 4:12.)

"For I perceive that ye are in the paths of righteousness; I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God; yea, I perceive that ye are making his paths straight.

"I perceive that it has been made known unto you, by the testimony of his word, that he cannot walk in crooked paths; neither doth he vary from that which he hath said; neither hath he a shadow of turning from the right to the left, or from that which is right to that which is wrong; therefore, his course is one eternal round." (Alma 7:19, 20.) (Read rest of chapter.)

"Therefore, come unto me speedily with a few of your men, and leave the remainder in the charge of Lehi and Teancum; give unto them power to conduct the war in that part of the land, according to the Spirit of God, which is also the spirit of freedom which is in them." (Alma 61:15.)

Nephi, the son of Helaman, was entrusted with all power over his people. (See Helaman 10:4-10.) Why was he given such power? Because he sought the Lord's will, not his own, and because his love of God included his love of the right.

—more on page 131

SUGGESTED MOTHER'S DAY PROGRAM

The world will judge largely of
"Mother" by you.

Be yours then the task, if task it
shall be,

To force the proud world to do
homage to me.

Be sure it will say when its verdict
you've won,

"She reaped as she sowed, Lo! this
is her son."

—Author Unknown

FAME

I would rather be loved by a little
girl

Than to be acclaimed by the great
and the wise;

Let others find fame in an illustrious
name,

I would find my glory within her
eyes.

For what is the worth of fame or
wealth,

Or the passing fancy of fickle men,
If at night there isn't the honest
smile

Of a child who is glad you are
home again?

—Christie Lund Coles

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THE BOOK OF MORMON

(Continued from page 116)

"For thou shalt not ask," said the
Lord, "that which is contrary to my
will."

The religious life portrayed and
encouraged in the Book of Mormon
is in harmony with the Spirit and
teachings of our Savior, for it is
in His life that we find such a won-
derful blending of the two great
commandments. His life was indeed
one of service, of compassion, of
going about doing good for men,
but remember how He began His
ministry by forty days of prayer
and fasting in the wilderness. Re-
member, too, how He chose fre-
quently to leave the multitude and
the Twelve to commune with the

Father, and how the disciples slept
while He prayed through the night?
The Savior's love of men was and
is inseparable from His love of God.

Our love of men will be also
greatly enriched by humility, grati-
tude, and our love of God and His
goodness. The Book of Mormon
makes this clear in its own original
and persuasive way.

"... let thy thoughts be directed
unto the Lord; yea, let the affec-
tions of thy heart be placed upon
the Lord forever." (Alma 37:36.)

In this article we have stressed
the love of God; in another, we shall
discuss the love of men.

"Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust." (Psalm 16:1.)