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The Book of Mormon — A Guide to Religious Living: XI. Conviction and Tolerance

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The Book of Mormon — A Guide to Religious Living

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XI. CONVICTION AND TOLERANCE

NEPHITE writers possessed a fine understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They taught it with power and conviction. To them it was man's guide to happiness and salvation.

It is interesting to note that their strong convictions did not lead to arrogance nor intolerance but were associated with humility and tolerance. Theirs was a view of God and his revelations to men worthy of the Creator of all men. They were humble about their own knowledge of truth and they also recognized the Lord as the fountain of goodness and truth among peoples of all nations. This combination of conviction and tolerance in the Book of Mormon is both inspiring and intriguing.

It is our aim in this article to illustrate the humility and tolerance for God's revelations to all men entertained by these Nephite writers who were unwavering in their own convictions.

HUMILITY

The Book of Mormon contains several choice passages on how God speaks to man. (Note especially II

Nephi, Chapters 28, 29, and 31:1-3.) He speaks from time to time, "here a little and there a little," and therefore it becometh every man to remain humble, to be receptive to truth, and to seek the fuller meaning of truths already revealed.

"Therefore, wo be unto him that is at ease in Zion! Wo be unto him that crieth: All is well! Yea, wo be unto him that hearkeneth unto the precepts of men, and denieth the power of God, and the gift of the Holy Ghost! Yea, wo be unto him that saith: We have received, and we need no more! Wo be unto him that shall say: We have received the word of God, and we need no more of the word of God, for we have enough! For behold, thus saith the Lord God: I will give unto the children of men line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; and blessed are those who hearken unto my precepts, and lend an ear unto my counsel, for they shall learn wisdom; for unto him that receiveth I will give more; and from them that shall say, we have enough, from them shall be taken away even that which they have. (II Nephi 28:24, 26, 27, 29, 30.)

How true of life everywhere—in science, in art, in daily life, in religion—is the above statement. As soon as one says, "I know it all," he not only fails to learn more but he even forgets part of that which he knows. Truth and virtue and every good thing must be cultivated if they are to be retained. Likewise, he who receives with an open and eager mind and a contrite heart will always receive more. This is true in religion as in every other walk of life.

Continuous revelation is one of the great themes of the Book of Mormon. That concept itself implies conviction and also a tolerance for new truths and for finer understandings and better applications of truths already revealed.

MEN OF ALL NATIONS INSPIRED

The Lord made it clear to Nephi that when the Nephite record would one day come forth among the Gentiles, they would not accept it, but would say, "A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible." (II Nephi 29:3.)

In reply to this objection the Lord inspired Nephi with a dynamic conception of how He operates among the children of men.

"Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heav-

ens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth? Wherefore murmur ye, because that ye shall receive more of my word? Know ye not that the testimony of two nations is a witness unto you that I am God, that I remember one nation like unto another? Wherefore, I speak the same words unto one nation like unto another. And when the two nations shall run together the testimony of the two nations shall run together also. And I do this that I may prove unto many that I am the same yesterday, today, and forever; and that I speak forth my words according to mine own pleasure. And because that I have spoken one word ye need not suppose that I cannot speak another; *for my work is not yet finished; neither shall it be until the end of man, neither from that time henceforth and forever.* Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written. For I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written. For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the

Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it." (II Nephi 29:7-12.)

Alma, the younger, who had been a rebel in his youth, repented and became a great missionary for the Church. He was so filled with a love of Christ that he wished to convert the whole world.

"O that I were an angel, and could have the wish of mine heart, that I might go forth and speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth, and cry repentance unto every people! Yea, I would declare unto every soul, as with the voice of thunder, repentance and the plan of redemption, that they should repent and come unto our God, that there might not be more sorrow upon all the face of the earth." (Alma 29:1, 2.)

Upon reflection Alma realized that he could not convert the whole world. He recognized too that the Lord inspired men of all nations to teach His word—even as much as they can understand. He therefore retracted his wish.

"But behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me. I ought not to harrow up in my desires, the firm decree of a just God, for I know that he granteth unto men according to their desire, whether it be unto death or unto life; yea, I

know that he allotteth unto men according to their wills, whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction. Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; he that knoweth not good from evil is blameless; but he that knoweth good and evil, to him it is given according to his desires, whether he desireth good or evil, life or death, joy or remorse of conscience. Now, seeing that I know these things, why should I desire more than to perform the work to which I have been called? Why should I desire that I were an angel, that I could speak unto all the ends of the earth? For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true." (Alma 29:3-8.)

THE GOOD IS OF GOD

Not only may men of all nations and every tongue be inspired of God, but everything that is good or everything "that inviteth and enticeth to do good" is of God. This is interestingly stated throughout the Book of Mormon.

"For I say unto you that whatsoever is good cometh from God, and whatsoever is evil cometh from the Devil." (Alma 5:40.)

"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, everything which inviteth and enticeth to do good and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God. Wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil. For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night. For behold, the spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God." (Moroni 7:12-16; read the entire chapter.)

IMPLICATIONS

Book of Mormon writers speak for God with authority and conviction. Yet they recognize clearly that there is much more truth to be revealed and also that men of all nations are inspired of God. They see the Lord at work among men everywhere persuading them to do good.

Latter-day Saints today may well

cultivate these same Book of Mormon attitudes. Ours is the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ and we belong to His Church. But there is much we do not understand nor fully appreciate about the gospel. We are as children in our knowledge of the things of God. "Believe," said King Benjamin, "That man doth not comprehend all the things which the Lord can comprehend." (Mosiah 4:9.)

Nor do we have a monopoly on truth. The Lord has raised up wise men in every nation, "to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have." (Alma 29:8.) Religious leaders, philosophers, poets, scientists, and men of good will everywhere have been led to truth and have taught things consistent with the great teachings of Jesus.

As followers of Jesus Christ we can be confident that we have within our reach the fullest revelation of God to man.

Ours is the responsibility to understand and to live the truth and thereby demonstrate humbly to the world our conception of truth and righteousness.

We learn, too, from the Book of Mormon that no one has any monopoly on goodness. "For the spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil." (Moroni 7:16.) Goodness everywhere and among all men is inspired of God.

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preserve the building as a monument to Joseph Smith. We then left it.

Elder Brigham Young addressed the Saints in the Grove and informed them that the company going to the West would start this week across the river.

Monday, Feb. 9. I packed up my goods and family and sent them over the river, remaining behind myself to close up some business and to prepare an additional wagon.

Thirty or forty State troops are in town.

In the afternoon the Temple was discovered to be on fire, but we put it out before much damage was done. We met in council with the Twelve and Presidents of the Seventies and heard two letters read. The band played several tunes on top of the Temple. I retired to rest much fatigued and out of health.

Tuesday, Feb. 10. My father and his family crossed the river.

Saturday, Feb. 14. I crossed the river and found my family at Brother Martin's in good spirits. President Brigham Young also crossed with his family.

Sunday, Feb. 15. I removed my family to the camp on Sugar Creek near the bridge in Ambrosial township, where the company was gathered. We found plenty of timber and water. Pitched our tents for the first time. Some slept in wagons and some in tents. The night was clear but cold.

Monday, Feb. 16. President Brigham Young called the Saints together and commenced to organize them into companies of hundreds, fifties and tens, giving them considerable instruction relative to the journey. It was severely cold.

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It is a good thing to be in possession of truth and to have strong convictions about goodness. A testimony of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is of priceless value.

These things are perfectly compatible, however, with a recognition of truth and goodness in others; yes, with rejoicing over finding truth and goodness no matter where.

Our thirteenth Article of Faith affirms this point of view. It was written by one who was schooled in the spirit of the Book of Mormon.

"We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things."

Readings in Book of Mormon:

II Nephi 28, 29, 31:1-3; Alma 5:40, 41 and 29:1-9; Moroni 7 and 10:24, 25.