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Lesson X. Sin and the Law

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Abstract: Introduction—Man prone to do evil—The testimony of David—Nations, families, individuals—Not only Satan, but God also, desires man—Provisions for remission of sin—Some Indian customs—The address of Alma to the people of Gideon—Admonishings against sin—Instructions to the ministers—The earthly origin of sin—The fallen angel—The word of Helaman—The original sin atoned for—The chief concern—The law of Moses—The gospel—The very appearance of evil denounced—The words of the prophets—Some offenses named — No sin where there is no law—The unpardonable sin —How gospel ceremonies came to the Indians—A memory gem.

—The testimony of Moroni—Mormon's exhortation—The Holy Ghost obtained by faith—The priesthood secured by faith—Many wondrous things wrought by faith—Power comes by faith—Miracles wrought by faith—Works essential—The faith of the Indian a natural inheritance—From a sermon by Mormon.

QUESTIONS.

1. What is meant by the statement that the Indian is a creature of faith?
2. Show from the customs of the Indian that he possessed a simple faith.
3. Show that faith is the first principle of both natural and revealed religion.
4. What is meant by counting faith to man for righteousness?

5. Why was Nephi blessed?
6. What did the Lord say to Moroni concerning faith?
7. What is the substance of Moroni's exhortation to exercise faith?
8. How is the gift of the Holy Ghost to be obtained?
9. What other blessings may be obtained by faith?
10. What is necessary to the exercise of the authority and power of the priesthood?
11. How is baptism dependent upon faith?
12. How may miracles be wrought?
13. Why is faith alone of no avail?
14. Why should we expect the American Indian to be a creature of faith?
15. Give the substance of the extract from Mormon's sermon.

LESSON X.

SIN AND THE LAW.

There is perhaps no truth more often or more clearly displayed in the history of the world than this, that man is prone to do evil. From the time that Adam partook of the forbidden fruit in the primitive garden, sin has lain at the door of man, and Satan has desired to gain possession of him. The great warrior-king of Israel, praying for the remission of his sins, exclaimed: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity."^a If one is to judge from the tendency to evil in man, then one must certainly conclude that David expressed the truth. Nay, more; one must conclude, that, not only was man shapen in iniquity, but also has he followed iniquity rather than righteousness all the days of his life. The story of the nations is only too often the story of their rise to opulence and power through a form of rigorous right living and of their decline and fall because of luxury, corruption, and unbridled wicked-

ness. And what is true of nations is true in a measure of families, and of individuals. Success, prosperity, health, happiness, reward the eschewing of evil and the cleaving to righteousness. Yet there is perhaps no normal man but can testify that sin lies always at his door, tapping, tapping, tapping, whispering, inviting, enticing. The individual life, as well as the national life, is evidence of the fact that man is prone to do evil.

Since sin is thus lying ever at the door of man to tempt him, one may well ask, Why is not man, then, worse even than he is recognized to be? What is it that keeps him in the way of righteousness at all? Fortunately, it is not only Satan who desires to gain possession of man. God, too, whose offspring man is, desires him. And God's desire springs from love. He has a Fatherly watchcare over His children. While he has wisely granted to them the unrestricted exercise of their free-agency, He has also wise-

^aPs. 51:5.

ly planted in their hearts the desire toward good. Sin lies at the door; but the God-given gifts of hope and high ideals dwell within-doors. They can be expelled only by weakly yielding to the temptation of evil. And they will not depart without resistance. They arouse something we call conscience. The consciousness of guilt makes man uneasy. Just as surely as his actions fall short of his knowledge of right, just so surely does he become painfully aware of his short-coming. A struggle ensues. The divine in man prompts him to make peace with his God. He presents sin-offerings. He confesses his fault. He seeks a remission of his offense in prayer. In every nation may be found the sin-consciousness, and the ritual provided to gain a remission of sin. In every form of religious worship, the presence of sin is recognized, and a way is provided whereby to make the sinner clean. In every age of the world the desire to righteousness within doors has battled against sin without. Conscience has led in the fray. And only when conscience—the keen perception that one has done wrong—has been beaten to silence, has man become a caloused sinner.^b It is, therefore, the divinely implanted hope of righteousness and the desire to do good, that helps to keep man in the way of the Lord.

It has been said that in every nation, and in every form of worship, the presence of sin is recognized, the desire of the individual to make amends for sin is admitted, and a way is provided whereby remission of sin may be obtained. This fact is admirably illustrated in the religious worship of the American Indian. The consciousness of sin

seems to have been strong with him from time immemorial. In his native worship may be found many rites and ceremonies that remind one of the ceremonial worship of Israel, and even of later ordinances of Christianity. Thus, it is reported that a Navajo who had carried a dead body to burial, held himself unclean until he had washed himself in specially prepared water. It is also reported that when a Peruvian of ancient times had confessed his sins, he bathed himself in a stream of water, repeating these words:

“O thou River, receive the sins I have this day confessed unto the Sun, carry them down to the sea, and let them never more appear.”

Moreover, amongst the American Indians was practiced the ceremony of baptism. Baptism was nearly always performed by immersion, and was for the purpose of washing away sin. It was known by a native word which means literally “to be born again.” “The order of baptism among the Aztecs commenced, ‘O child receive the water of the Lord of the world, which is our life; it is to wash and to purify; may these drops remove the sin which was given to thee before the creation of the world, since all of us are under its power;’ and concluded, ‘Now he liveth anew, and is born anew, now is he purified and cleansed, now our mother the Water again bringeth him into the world.’”^c In the baptismal ceremony, the individual sin and the sin of the world were thus both removed. It was the ordinance whereby the sinner was assured of a remission of his offense. By the purification of

^bRead James Whitcomb Riley's *My Conscience* in the *July Century*, or in the *August Current Opinion*.

^cFor a full discussion of this subject read Brinton, *The Myths of the New World*, ch. 5, and the references there cited.

water, the prick of conscience was allayed.

Examples of the consciousness of guilt and of provisions for satisfying the broken law might be multiplied. These, however, will suffice. Since, now, the dictum that man is prone to do evil applies to all men generally, and since the American Indians are seen specifically to have recognized man's weakness and to have provided for it, it becomes but natural to ask, Whence did the Indians gain the sin-consciousness? Whence did they learn the rites and ceremonies whereby to become clean and to receive a remission of sin? To those who are familiar with the fact that the American Indian is descended from the peoples of the Book of Mormon, another question follows inevitably: What does the Book of Mormon teach of sin and the law?

In the Nephite theology, man's proneness to do evil was admitted to be ever with him. In a notable address delivered to the people of Gideon, Alma urged his hearers to "lay aside every sin, which easily doth beset you, which doth bind you down to destruction," and exhorted them further to yield obedience to the word of God, and to enter into a covenant with him "by going into the waters of baptism."^d Yet, while it was admitted that sin easily besets man, it was well understood that sin is abominable to God.^e Therefore were the ministers to the Nephites instructed to "teach them an everlasting hatred against sin and iniquity; [to] preach unto them repentance, and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; * * * [to] teach them to withstand every temptation of the devil, with their faith on the Lord Jesus Christ; [to] teach them

to never be weary of good works, but to be meek and lowly in heart: for such shall find rest to their souls."^f

The earthly origin of sin is found, in the teachings of the Book of Mormon as in those of the Bible, to lie in the transgression of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. But that which was to cause sin to appear upon the earth had its origin, as did the Gospel plan itself, before the foundations of the earth were laid. This, too, the Book of Mormon teaches clearly. Lehi wrote and preached about the fall of an angel of God from heaven. This fallen angel became "that old serpent, who is the devil, who is the father of all lies."^g It was this fallen angel "who did entice our first parents to partake of the forbidden fruit." And Helaman finds this same fallen angel inspiring the sins of the world. It was he who plotted with Cain and his followers after him. It was he "who put it into the hearts of the people to build a tower sufficiently high that they might get to heaven." It was he who accomplished the degradation and the destruction of the Jaredites. It was he who, in the times of which Helaman writes, inspired Gadianton to carry on "the work of darkness, and of secret murder." It was he who was bringing about the rejection of the Nephites. "Behold, it is he who is the author of all sin. And behold, he doth carry on his works of darkness and secret murder, and doth hand down their plots, and their oaths and their covenants, and their plans of awful wickedness, from generation to generation, according as he can get hold upon the hearts of the children of men."^h It

^dAlma 7:15.

^eJac. 2:5.

^fAlma 37:32-34.

^g11 Nephi 2:16-18.

^hHel. 6:25-30.

is he, the author of sin, who lies watching at the door of man, striving to gain entrance into his soul. Through his ministry of evil sin came into the world and continues to beset man.

Of the consequences of the original sin we need now, however, to sorrow no more. We have learned that because of the original sin we are. We have learned further that, in mercy, the effects of that sin have been removed through the atonement of Jesus Christ. These things were taught clearly to the Nephites. Even before the Christ had come, the Nephites were exhorted to look forward to his atoning sacrifice. Says Lehi, nearly six hundred years before the Christ's advent upon the earth, "The Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that He may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because they are removed from the fall, they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves, and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God has given."⁴

What concerned the children of Lehi most, therefore, was what the law had to say to them concerning their individual sins. For, as we have already learned, their scripture taught that men would be rewarded according to their works. Lehi argued that Jesus Christ would offer "Himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered."⁵ And Alma insisted that there could be no sin if there was

no law; and there could be no law if there was no punishment.⁶ To the law, therefore, to learn what it had to say of the individual life.

Before the coming of the Lord, the Nephites conformed their religious life, it seems, mainly to the law of Moses.⁷ But after the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, in whom the law of Moses was fulfilled,⁸ "they did not walk any more after the performances and ordinances of the law of Moses, but they did walk after the commandments which they had received from their Lord and their God."⁹ Since, however, the law of Moses and the law of the Gospel enjoin the same strict observance of the practice of righteousness, it will not be necessary to consider them separately. What does the Book of Mormon teach of individual sin?

It may be said, in general, that the Book of Mormon denounces the very appearance of evil in the life of man, and exhorts, admonishes, and encourages to purity and righteousness of thought and of deed. Jacob, the brother of the first Nephi, summarizes thus the nature of his own instructions to the people, who already in his day were becoming numerous: "Now I, Jacob, spake many more things unto the people of Nephi, warning them against fornication and lasciviousness, and every kind of sin, telling them the awful consequences of them."¹⁰ Abinadi appeared before King Noah and read to him and to his people the ten commandments, and other parts of the law of Moses, enjoining upon them strict observance of this

⁴Alma 42:17.

⁵II Nephi 5:10; Mos. 12, 13; III Nephi 1:24.

⁶III Nephi 9:17.

⁷IV Nephi 1:12.

⁸Jac. 3:12.

⁴II Nephi 2:26.

⁵II Nephi 2:7.

word of God.^p The priests whom Alma sent out among the people preached "against all lyings, and deceivings, and envyings, and strifes, and malice, and revilings, and stealing, robbing, plundering, murdering, committing adultery, and all manner of lasciviousness, crying that these things ought not so to be."^q Helaman declared that it was because of the practice of these sins that the Nephites did not prosper, but were smitten and afflicted, and driven before the Lamanites.^r And when the Savior came to visit the Nephites, He repeated to them the wonderful sermon on the Mount, with its keyword, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."^s Thus, the Nephite theology enjoined the strictest purity of life in thought, in word, and in act. Almost every vice is specifically named and condemned. It was declared that the Lord God delighteth in the chastity of women;^t and that chastity and virtue were "most dear and precious above all things."^u

It will not be necessary to enumerate further specific offenses. It is clear that the Nephites were taught to live pure, holy, Christlike lives. The law was given to them forbidding sin. Penalties were imposed upon the violation of the law of righteousness. With the Nephite there could be sin because there was law; and there could be law because there was punishment. But the Nephite doctrine of sin and law was no narrow doctrine. It was well understood that there could be no punishment where there was no law. Nephi the First stated this truth thus: "Wherefore he has given a

law; and where there is no law given, there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation, the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of Him."^v Alma, too, reasoned in the same way.^w And Mormon declared boldly that the redemption saved all who have no law. Said he, "For the power of redemption cometh on all [them] that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing."^x It is for this reason that baptism of little children is a mockery before God.

It should be noted that the Nephites knew not only the common sins that beset man—concerning which the law had been given them—but also the great sin known as the unpardonable sin. Jacob records that in his day there came among the people an anti-Christ named Sherem. Sherem, however, became converted through the power of God. Then he lamented, "I fear lest I have committed the unpardonable sin, for I have lied unto God: for I have denied the Christ, and said that I believed the scriptures; and they truly testify of Him."^y Sherem understood, therefore, that the unpardonable sin consisted of the denying of the Christ. In the exhortation to his son Corianton, Alma explains the unpardonable sin more fully. "For behold," he says, "if ye deny the Holy Ghost when it once has had place in you, and ye know that ye deny it, behold,

^pMos. 13.

^qAlma 16:18.

^rHelam. 4:11-13.

^sIII Nephi, chs. 12-14.

^tJac. 2:28.

^uMoro. 9:9.

^vII Nephi 9:25.

^wAlma 42:17-21.

^xJac. 7:19.

^yMoro. 8:22.

this is a sin which is unpardonable."^s

Thus, the Book of Mormon teaches clearly the relation between sin and law. It enumerates the offenses that beset man from the simplest to the most serious. It teaches, too, as we have already learned the Gospel plan of salvation, and provides a way whereby man may obtain a remission of his sins. And when the Nephites became exterminated, and only the Lamanites and the renegade Nephites remained in the land, undoubtedly a knowledge of the relation of sin and law remained with them, and also a knowledge of the ceremonies by which might come remission of sins. From this knowledge have come the corrupted forms of Christian worship found among the American Indians.

To conclude this lesson there is no better sentiment than that expressed at the close of one of Mormon's sermons. It should be memorized. It should be studied carefully. Every word has a meaning that the follower of the sinless Nazarene can not afford to overlook. The sentiment may be found in Moroni 7:45-48.

OUTLINE.

Introduction—Man prone to do evil—The testimony of David—Nations, families, individuals—Not only Satan, but God also, desires man—Provisions for remission of sin—Some Indian customs—The address of Alma to the people of Gideon—Admonishings against sin—Instructions to the ministers—The earthly origin of sin—The fallen angel—The word of Helaman—

^sAlma 39:6.

The original sin atoned for—The chief concern—The law of Moses—The gospel—The very appearance of evil denounced—The words of the prophets—Some offenses named—No sin where there is no law—The unpardonable sin—How gospel ceremonies came to the Indians—A memory gem.

QUESTIONS.

1. Why is man prone to do evil?
2. What is meant by the saying that sin lies at the door of man?
3. What is shown by the story of the nations?
4. What is the experience of individuals?
5. Why is not man worse than he is?
6. What is conscience?
7. Why do ceremonies for the remission of sins exist in all nations and in all creeds?
8. Name some ancient Israelitish customs found among the Indians?
9. What did the Indians teach concerning baptism?
10. What did the term used for baptism signify?
11. How is man's proneness to do evil admitted in the Book of Mormon?
12. What were the ministers to the Nephites instructed to teach?
13. What is the earthly origin of sin?
14. What does the Book of Mormon teach of the fall of Lucifer?
15. What does Helaman teach of Lucifer?
16. Why need not man trouble about the consequences of the original sin?
17. By what law were the Nephites governed?
18. What did the Nephite law teach of individual sin?
19. Name specifically the teachings of some of the prophets.
20. Why can there be no sin where there is no law?
21. What is the unpardonable sin?
22. Summarize the teachings of this lesson.
23. Repeat from memory Moroni 7:45-48.