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Moroni 9-10: Remember How Merciful the Lord Hath Been

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Bruce K. Satterfield

President Ezra Taft Benson declared, “The Book of Mormon brings men to Christ” (“The Book of Mormon” 83). In this declaration, he reaffirmed the fundamental importance of the Book of Mormon in the salvation of humankind. From its beginning to its conclusion, it bears witness of Christ and teaches of his atonement that makes possible “the plan of mercy” (Alma 42:15, 23). Through this plan we can be delivered from the power of Satan and our own imperfection. Throughout the Book of Mormon, the prophets urge everyone to come unto Christ (see 1 Nephi 6:4; 13:40; 2 Nephi 9:45, 51; 26:33; Jacob 1:7; 6:5; Omni 1:26; Alma 5:34–35; 3 Nephi 12:20; Mormon 9:27; 29:2). The last prophet to make this plea was Moroni.

In the final chapter of the Book of Mormon before he sealed up the plates from which it was translated, Moroni invited “all the ends of the earth . . . [to] come unto Christ, and be perfected in him” (Moroni 10:24, 32). However, Moroni 10 is more than just an invitation. Through a series of exhortations Moroni teaches us how to come unto Christ, and he also gives insight into the power of God that perfects and sanctifies those who do come unto him.

Moroni 10 in Context

The invitation to come unto Christ offered by Moroni in the final chapter is a fitting conclusion to this encouraging book. It is a curious thing, therefore, that Moroni included in his writings an appalling

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letter from his father. Even more striking is the fact that Moroni placed the letter immediately before his own invitation for everyone to come unto Christ.

In the letter, Mormon described in awful terms the degenerated condition of the Nephites. They had sunk to such extreme depths of brutality and perversion that rape, murder, and cannibalism were considered “a token of bravery” (Moroni 9:10). Mormon lamented this condition, saying:

O the depravity of my people! They are without order and without mercy. . . . And they have become strong in their perversion; and they are alike brutal, sparing none, neither old nor young; and they delight in everything save that which is good; and the suffering of our women and our children upon all the face of this land doth exceed everything; yea, tongue cannot tell, neither can it be written. (Moroni 9:18–19)

Because of the Nephites’ wickedness, Mormon told his son that “I cannot recommend them unto God lest he should smite me” (v 21).

The letter shocks the reader. Yet, that may well have been Moroni’s intent. He offers no explanation as to why he included this letter in his writings. However, as it stands, it provides a striking contrast that enhances Moroni’s invitation to come unto Christ. This is what Gerald N. Lund calls a scriptural foil: a technique used by scriptural writers who place “two contrasting principles or examples side by side to show even more clearly what they [are] trying to teach” (108). Moroni chapters 9 and 10 together contain the last of several contrasts found in the Book of Mormon that illustrate one of its major themes: we are “free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil” (2 Nephi 2:27). Chapter 9 illustrates what happens when we choose “captivity and death” through the power of Satan, while chapter 10 offers hope and encouragement to those who desire “liberty and eternal life” through Christ.

Come unto Christ through the Book of Mormon

Moroni’s final message is a well-designed study on the mercy and power of God that brings his children to perfection. It is built around a series of eight exhortations that show us how we can come unto Christ and receive his saving grace. The first six exhortations are

directed toward the Lamanites while the last two are addressed “unto all the ends of the earth” (Moroni 10:24).

Though the first six exhortations are directed to the Lamanites, their message can be applied to all people. From the first three exhortations (Moroni 10:3–7), we learn that the Book of Mormon is a powerful instrument that brings its readers to Christ. Within these verses two steps are discussed that, if followed, will lead the readers to a testimony of the reality of Christ and the power of his mercy. Gaining a testimony of Christ is an essential ingredient in the process of coming unto him. Both steps, therefore, will be briefly discussed.

The Lord’s Mercy from Adam Down

The first step is to read the Book of Mormon; however, merely reading it is not enough. Moroni exhorts us that “when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye should receive these things” (Moroni 10:3). The scriptures are the primary source for obtaining knowledge concerning God’s mercy from Adam to the present time. This is especially true of the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Lehi quoted Joseph of Egypt to teach that these two books would “grow together” in the last days, bringing latter-day Israel “to the knowledge of their fathers” (2 Nephi 3:12), ie, a record of God’s dealings with mankind from the creation of man until the coming of Christ and the establishment of his church in the old and new worlds. Found within this record is example after example of how God’s mercy was extended to those who exercised faith in him, even to their temporal and spiritual salvation. It is precisely this pattern that Moroni encouraged the reader of the Book of Mormon to ponder, for it generates hope and inspires the reader to exercise faith in God.

Of all the events recorded in the Book of Mormon, the single most important event referred to is the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It was this act alone that made possible the extension of God’s mercy to mankind (see Alma 42:23). Concerning the atonement, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

The atonement is the most transcendent event that ever has occurred or ever will occur from creation’s morn through all the endless ages of eternity. It is

the occasion on which a God paid the ransom to reclaim fallen man, and all created things, from the effects of Adam's fall. In it, Jesus Christ, who became the first immortal flesh, paid the penalty for the transgression of the First Adam, who was the first mortal flesh. In it, the Only Begotten made amends for a broken law, satisfied the demands of justice, and took upon himself the sins of all men on conditions of repentance. Through it, all men are raised in immortality while those who believe and obey are raised also unto eternal life in the kingdom of the Father. The atonement makes possible a reconciliation between God and man; it provides a Savior and a Redeemer for mortals; it gives man an advocate and an intercessor in the court above. The atonement is the great and eternal plan of redemption. (107)

Manifest Truth by the Power of the Holy Ghost

The second step is to receive a witness of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. To achieve this, Mormon exhorts us to “ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true.” He further states that “if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost” (Moroni 10:4). Without a manifestation of the Holy Ghost, it is not possible to be truly converted to the Book of Mormon. This is true of all gospel principles. Therefore, Moroni asserts that “by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things” (v 4).

When we receive a testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, we have essentially received a testimony of the reality of Jesus Christ. “And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is” (Moroni 10:6). The Book of Mormon brings us to believe in Jesus Christ. However, more than just having a belief in Christ, we must know that he is. Moroni says that this knowledge can be gained only “by the power of the Holy Ghost” or “the power of God” (Moroni 10:7). This is the way God has always borne testimony to his children; “For he worketh by power [or the Holy Ghost], according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever” (v 7).

Spiritual Gifts

The next three exhortations focus on spiritual gifts which are extended to those who, as a result of receiving a testimony of Christ,

have come unto him through baptism and have received the Gift of the Holy Ghost. As has been shown, the knowledge that the Book of Mormon is true and that Jesus is the Christ comes through the manifestation of the Holy Ghost to those who receive it faithfully. However, as Elder Dallin H. Oaks has said, “We need to distinguish between a *manifestation* of the Holy Ghost and the *Gift* of the Holy Ghost. As men and women desire to believe, they develop faith in God (see Alma 32:26–43). When they have enough faith, they can receive a manifestation of the Holy Ghost.” He further taught that the manifestations of the Holy Ghost “are preparatory gifts . . . given to lead earnest seekers to repentance and baptism” (68).

All those who have been led by the preparatory gifts of the Spirit to come unto Christ through baptism are promised the Gift of the Holy Ghost. “Spiritual gifts come to those who have received the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Oaks 68). These gifts play an important role in perfecting the Saints of God. Moroni’s fourth exhortation is to those who have received the Gift of the Holy Ghost: “And again, I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God. And there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them” (Moroni 10:8).

Moroni then lists various spiritual gifts including teaching the word of wisdom, teaching the word of knowledge, faith, healing, working of mighty miracles, prophecy, ministering of angels, tongues, and interpretation of tongues (Moroni 10:9–16). However, Moroni’s list is only a sample of the many gifts available. Elder McConkie wrote: “These gifts are infinite in number and endless in their manifestations because God himself is infinite and endless, and because the needs of those who receive them are as numerous, varied, and different as there are people in the kingdom” (270). Elder Marvin J. Ashton had this in mind when he spoke of “less-conspicuous gifts.” He said:

Taken at random, let me mention a few gifts that are not always evident or noteworthy but that are very important. . . . The gift of asking; the gift of listening; the gift of hearing and using a still, small voice; the gift of being able to weep; the gift of avoiding contention; the gift of being agreeable; the gift of avoiding vain repetition; the gift of seeking that which is righteous; the gift of not passing judgment; the gift of looking to God for guidance; the gift of being

a disciple; the gift of caring for others; the gift of being able to ponder; the gift of offering prayer; the gift of bearing a mighty testimony; and the gift of receiving the Holy Ghost. (23)

Concerning spiritual gifts, Elder Oaks has remarked: “Spiritual gifts do not come visibly, automatically, and immediately to all who have received the gift of the Holy Ghost” (69). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that it “require[s] time and circumstances to call these gifts into operation” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 246; hereafter *TPJS*). Therefore, the command of the Lord is to “seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given; For verily I say unto you, they are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, and him that seeketh so to do” (D&C 46:8–9).

Spiritual gifts unlock the divine potential found within the recipient and in so doing, eventually bring about perfection. Elder George Q. Cannon said:

If any of us are imperfect, it is our duty to pray for the gift that will make us perfect. Have I imperfections? I am full of them. What is my duty? To pray to God to give me the gifts that will correct these imperfections. . . . They are intended for this purpose. No man ought to say, “Oh, I cannot help this; it is my nature.” He is not justified in it, for the reason that God has promised to give strength to correct these things and to give gifts that will eradicate them. . . . That is the design of God concerning His children. . . . Every defect in the human character can be corrected through the exercise of faith and pleading with the Lord for the gifts that He has said He will give unto those who believe and obey His commandments. (*Gospel Truth* 196)

Elder Oaks taught that “we should seek after spiritual gifts. They can lead us to God. They can shield us from the power of the adversary. They can compensate for our inadequacies and repair our imperfections” (72). Spiritual gifts are an important aspect of the atonement of Christ and come to us because of his mercy. Through spiritual gifts the healing of our infirmities, whether physical or spiritual, is brought about.

Our duty, then, is to do all in our own power to seek after these gifts. On another occasion, President George Q. Cannon taught:

How many of you are seeking for these gifts that God has promised to bestow?
How many of you, when you bow before your Heavenly Father in your family circle or in your secret places, contend for these gifts to be bestowed upon you?
How many of you ask the Father in the name of Jesus to manifest Himself to

you through these powers and these gifts? Or do you go along day by day like a door turning on its hinges, without having any feeling upon the subject, without exercising any faith whatever, content to be baptized and be members of the Church and to rest there, thinking that your salvation is secure because you have done this? (*Gospel Truth* 195–96)

Elder McConkie wrote:

Is it proper to seek for spiritual gifts? . . . If spiritual gifts are interwoven with and form part of the very gospel of salvation itself, can we enjoy the fullness of that gospel without possessing the gifts that are part of it? . . . And if we are to seek the gospel, if we are to hunger and thirst after righteousness, if our whole souls must cry out for the goodness of God and his everlasting association, how can we exempt ourselves from seeking the gifts of the spirit that come from and prepare us for his presence? (369)

The reception of spiritual gifts depends upon our asking, seeking, and motive. The Lord told the Prophet Joseph Smith that spiritual gifts are given “that all may be benefited that seek or that ask of me, that ask and not for a sign that they may consume it upon their lusts” (D&C 46:9). Moroni tells us that the medium through which spiritual gifts are manifest to men is “the Spirit of Christ” (Moroni 10:17). The Spirit of Christ is the light of Christ, the same light that “giveth light to every man that cometh into the world” (D&C 84:46). Elder McConkie taught that the light of Christ is “the agency used by the Holy Ghost to manifest truth and dispense spiritual gifts to many people at one and the same time” (70).

Good Gifts Versus Evil Gifts

Moroni’s fifth exhortation is a reminder of where spiritual gifts come from. “And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ” (Moroni 10:18). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught that spiritual gifts “are what Christ ascended into heaven to impart” (*TPJS* 245).

However, the phrase “good gift” implies that there are evil gifts. Mormon taught:

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. (Moroni 7:12–13)

Elder McConkie has written concerning good and evil gifts in these terms: “Life itself depends upon the existence of opposites. . . . Thus, if there are good gifts that come from God, there are also evil gifts that spring forth from Satan.” He then contrasted several gifts. If there is “a gift of preaching by the power of the Holy Ghost,” he said, “there is a gift of intellectual persuasion, a gift of sophistry and delusion that pleases carnal men and lets them feel that they can believe what they will.” Again, if there is “a gift of charity, of enjoying and possessing the pure love of Christ,” then Satan offers “a gift of selfishness, of putting one’s own interests first in all things.” Further, “gifts of purity, of chastity, of clean thoughts, of upright living, all of which cleanse and perfect the soul of men and prepare them to be at ease in the fellowship of angels and holy beings” are opposed by “gifts of lust, of lewdness, of profane and evil speaking, of filling one’s mind with carnal and evil thoughts, all of which lead to vulgar and immoral acts that prepare men for the continuing association of evil spirits in the realms ahead” (376–77).

The intent of Satan’s evil gifts is to lead man away from Christ and the gifts he offers, especially the gift of eternal life. Evil gifts cause us to lose faith and abandon the path that leads to “liberty and eternal life.” Those in this situation are bound by “the captivity and power of the devil.” This is Satan’s plan, for “he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27). This is precisely the condition of the Nephites in Moroni 9 and what Moroni wants us to avoid.

Disbelief Does Away with Spiritual Gifts

Moroni’s sixth exhortation comes as a warning: “Remember that [God] is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that all these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men” (Moroni 10:19). It should be remembered that earlier in this chapter, Moroni taught that God works by power “according to the faith of the children of men” (v 7). When faith ceases so do spiritual gifts. Without spiritual gifts there is no perfection. Without perfection there is no possibility of exaltation. Therefore,

Moroni says, “there must be faith” (v 20). He then tells us that the proper exercise of faith produces hope, which is an expectation or anticipation of exaltation. Hope encourages the righteous to faithfully keep the commandments of God. Charity, or “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47), is the product of keeping God’s commandments. Those who possess charity are “saved in the kingdom of God” (10:21). However, Moroni says, iniquity causes despair, and despair dispels hope, and without hope there is no charity (vv 21–22).

Having said this, Moroni turns his attention “unto all the ends of the earth.” To them he also says, “If the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you, it shall be because of unbelief” (Moroni 10:24). If that happened, apostasy would rule the world. “And wo be unto the children of men if this be the case; for there shall be none that doeth good among you, no not one” (v 25). Those in this condition would “die in their sins, and they cannot be saved in the kingdom of God” (v 26). That is what happened after Moroni’s death. For several hundred years the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ with all its spiritual gifts was not available on the earth because of unbelief.

Moroni knew that after long years of apostasy, the Book of Mormon would come forth as a witness to all the world that Jesus is the Christ. He also knew that most of the world would reject the message of the Book of Mormon. To those who reject the Book of Mormon, Moroni said, “I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not.” How will we know this? Moroni continued, “For ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?” (Moroni 10:27). He then told them: “God shall show unto you that that which I have written is true” (v 29).

Come unto Christ and Be Perfected in Him

From the time that the Book of Mormon came forth, marking the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ including spiritual gifts, Satan has opposed the growth of the kingdom of God through the great and abominable church with its array of evil gifts (see 1 Nephi 14:10–17). Knowing this would happen, Moroni entreats his readers in these

words: “I would exhort you that ye would come unto Christ, and lay hold upon every good gift, and touch not the evil gift, nor the unclean thing” (Moroni 10:30). Further, he paraphrases the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 52), and admonishes the Saints of God in the latter days to “awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion; and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever, that thou mayest no more be confounded, that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled” (Moroni 10:31).

The phrase “awake, and arise from the dust” was first used in the Book of Mormon by Lehi in the context of awaking from a spiritual sleep (see 2 Nephi 1:13–14, 21–23). Moroni uses the same phrase to exhort scattered Israel in the last days to awaken from their spiritual sleep and hear the message of the restoration. The Lord uses similar language in a latter-day revelation: “For Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments” (D&C 82:14).

Commenting on this verse, President Harold B. Lee said:

Zion, as used here, undoubtedly had reference to the Church. . . . To be worthy of such a sacred designation as Zion, the Church must think of itself as a bride adorned for her husband, as John the Revelator recorded when he saw in vision the Holy City where the righteous dwelled, adorned as a bride for the Lamb of God as her husband. Here is portrayed the relationship the Lord desires in his people in order to be acceptable to our Lord and Master even as a wife would adorn herself in beautiful garments for her husband.

The rule by which the people of God must live in order to be worthy of acceptance in the sight of God is indicated by the text to which I have made reference. This people must increase in beauty before the world; have an inward loveliness which may be observed by mankind as a reflection in holiness and in those inherent qualities of sanctity. The borders of Zion, where the righteous and pure in heart may dwell, must now begin to be enlarged. The stakes of Zion must be strengthened. All this so that Zion may arise and shine by becoming increasingly diligent in carrying out the plan of salvation throughout the world. (3)

How can Zion “put on [her] beautiful garments” and “increase in beauty”? The answer can be found in the conclusion of Moroni’s final exhortation:

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. (Moroni 10:32–33)

Zion will become beautiful in the sight of the Lord when she comes unto Christ and is perfected in him. Only through Christ can we become spiritually and physically complete.

Moroni encouraged his readers to “deny yourselves of all ungodliness” (Moroni 10:32). President Benson taught, “To deny oneself of all ungodliness is to come to Christ by ordinances and covenants to repent of any sins which prevent the Spirit of the Lord from taking precedence in our lives” (“This is a Day of Sacrifice” 32). Those who come unto Christ obtain his saving grace and “are perfect in Christ.” In other words, because of their complete devotion to God’s work and glory, they have become at-one with Christ. Through his atonement, their sins have been remitted and their weaknesses have been made strengths. Those who have become “perfect in Christ” are “sanctified in Christ by the grace of God.” To be sanctified is to be purified, to be made free from the stain and effects of sin. Those who attain this condition are “holy, without spot” (Moroni 10:31, 33). It is as if they had never committed sin. These are they who have put on their “beautiful garments” (v 31; see also Isaiah 52:1).

Summary

A dominant theme that permeates the Book of Mormon is that we are “free to choose liberty and eternal life, through the great Mediator of all men, or to choose captivity and death, according to the captivity and power of the devil” (2 Nephi 2:27). This theme is illustrated over and over again throughout the Book of Mormon. Moroni chapters 9–10, together, form a perfect conclusion both to the Book of Mormon and this theme. Chapter 9 illustrates the debilitating power Satan has over those who “choose captivity and death.” On the other hand, the eight exhortations found in chapter 10 teach how God’s mercy can be extended to us through his grace. We must come unto Christ through the Book of Mormon and know that he is. Then,

after receiving the Gift of the Holy Ghost, we must seek for spiritual gifts that enable us and perfect our weaknesses. Having been made perfect in Christ, we will be sanctified by him. Thus, unlike the Nephites whom Mormon could not recommend unto God, those of us who come unto Christ will stand approved of God and worthy to come into his presence.

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