

Sermon Subject: SPIRITUAL AND ETHICAL LEVELS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

Scripture: Moroni 7:11-16, Book of Mormon

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 they may know good from evil; wherefore I shew unto you the way to judge: for everything 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; but whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil, For after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.

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Whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good, is of me, for good cometh of none, save it be of me.

In our scripture lesson we have already laid down a principle which will be the text or thesis of this sermon -- that whatever persuades, exhorts, and entices men to do good, and to love God, and to serve him and fellow man, is of God. Perhaps this principle needs some qualification or limitation, but it is essentially true. Sometimes a perfectly good act, done from evil motivation, and for evil purposes, is evil. The devil may entice man to do what seems to be good, and what if done by any other man under any other circumstances would be good, but if the ultimate purpose of that good act is evil, the act itself is evil, and the enticement to do it for that end or purpose was evil. The truth still remains, then; whatsoever enticeth men to do good, AND to love and serve God, is of God. I have yet to hear of the devil or any of his cohorts striving to persuade men to love and serve God.

Now, if it is true that whatsoever entices men to do good and to love and serve God is of God, and if the Book of Mormon entices men to do good and to love and serve God, then the logical conclusion is inescapable; the Book of Mormon is of God. Many people have the mistaken notion that the Book of Mormon is an evil book that entices men into all kinds of sin and depravity. If you have that idea of the Book of Mormon, we invite you to read the book, examining its moral and ethical teachings for yourself for no one who has carefully read the book could ever again say that its teachings are evil. Its moral tone is high -- higher in many respects than the Bible. Its spiritual and ethical standards are above reproach. This we shall try to show with a brief digest of some of the specific teachings and quotations from the book.

In previous sermons we have covered something of the doctrinal content of the Book of Mormon. But since the spiritual quality of any book depends in large degree upon its concept of God and Christ, let us repeat what some of you may not have heard us say previously. The Book of Mormon teaches in plainness and simplicity that there is one God, the Eternal Father, the maker and ruler of heaven and earth, the source of all good; that there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was deity incarnate in human flesh; that man who was created innocent in the beginning fell by reason of transgression; that the atonement of Jesus Christ opened the way of salvation whereby men could be restored to the presence of God and receive also a new and perfected body through the resurrection; that this atonement was completed by means of Christ's

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death on the cross and his victory over that death. In all this, the Book of Mormon proposes no conflict with the Bible. In all this, the Book of Mormon points men to God and Christ, and entices them to repent from evil and serve him and do good. The Book of Mormon gives unassailable proof that Jesus' resurrection was a physical fact; for after his ascension from the old world, he appeared in the flesh to the native American people who wrote the Book of Mormon, gave them his laws, established his church, ordained his priesthood, instituted his ordinances, and effected a complete change in the hearts of a great nation of people which ushered in their golden age. In all these teachings, the Book of Mormon entices to do good, and to worship and love and serve God, and his Son, Jesus Christ.

Let us turn now to some of the moral and ethical teachings of the Book of Mormon and see whether they entice men towards good or towards evil. Among Book of Mormon peoples, as among all peoples, sooner or later there rises the temptation to think of one's own race as the master race, to think of one's own religion as the one true religion which everyone else should be forced to accept, since it is the only way he can be saved. The Book of Mormon has no tolerance whatever for that attitude. The laws of Book of Mormon people given of God through their prophets, forbade persecution of any man because of his religious belief. Complete freedom of religion was supported by law. Any man might teach anything he pleased, so long as he did not try to force others to accept his teachings against their will. God's way is always to rely on the good judgment of an informed people, and to allow them to use their own free moral will and agency in making their choices, in order that they may be held accountable for those free choices in the day of judgment. The way of God has always left men free to choose; the way of the devil has always been to force men into error. The Book of Mormon teaches religious freedom.

On the question of racial prejudices, the Book of Mormon speaks out clearly. There were two races in Book of Mormon times -- the white Nephites, and the darker Lamanites, ancestors of today's Indians. The Nephites were told, "Revile no more against them because of the darkness of their skins," and were then shown how the dark skinned people were serving God more truly in some respects than the vain Nephites. "The Lord esteemeth all flesh in one," says the Book of Mormon. "All men are privileged the one like unto another, and none are forbidden." "Ye shall not esteem one flesh above another." "Think of your brethren like unto yourselves." "One being is as precious in his sight as another."

The Book of Mormon stands firmly for the political as well as the religious freedom of men, and teaches against slavery or bondage of any kind. Though these principles were often disregarded by Godless groups from time to time, King Benjamin near the close of his reign reminded his people: "Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons, nor that ye should make slaves one of another." Moroni, a great prophet-general of the Book of Mormon, devoted his life to defending his people against their enemies, the Lamanites, who would have brought them into bondage and slavery. He is characterized by the Book of Mormon as a man "whose soul did joy in the liberty and the freedom of his country, and his brethren from bondage and slavery."

Growing out of this regard for all men as brothers, by reason of the common Fatherhood of God, is the principle of helping needy men and women and children through charitable deeds and almsgiving. This, too, the Book of Mormon teaches. Prayer or any other worship of God is vain, if not accompanied by charity and compassion for needy and suffering fellow-man. Riches are promised to those who seek for them, if they seek with the intent to do good. The principle of free will is always emphasized; there is no forced levelling off into socialism or communism advocated in the Book of Mormon; but it is counselled: "Think of your brethren like unto yourselves, and be familiar with all, free with your substance, that they may be rich like unto you." "And they did impart of their substance, every man according to that which he had, to the poor, and the needy, and the sick and afflicted."

Concerning contention, the Book of Mormon says: "He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger one with another. Beloved, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger one against another, but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away ....."

Concerning pride, the Book of Mormon says: "See that ye are not lifted up unto pride." Human nature being what it is, whenever Book of Mormon peoples achieved a high level of prosperity, they tended to become proud, and to assume that they had done it all themselves, and to feel superior to their poorer brethren. But to them the prophet Jacob said: "And because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren, ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks, and high heads, because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren, because ye suppose that ye are better than they ..... Let not this pride of your hearts destroy your souls."

By precept and example, Book of Mormon prophets and kings counselled industry and upheld the dignity of manual labor. Their people worked in gold, silver, iron, brass and wood; they made fine silk, linen and other cloth; they fashioned tools and weapons; they built magnificent buildings and temples; they cultivated the land and raised all manner of grain and fruits and flocks and herds and fatlings ... King Benjamin in his farewell address to his people, reminds them: "I have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you .... and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne." Alma, a chief judge as well as a prophet and religious teacher, said to one who accused him of teaching falsehood in order to live without working, "Thou knowest that we do not glut ourselves upon the labors of this people; for behold, I have labored even from the commencement of the reign of the Judges, until now, with my hands, for my support....." This principle was followed by the priests: "they were not to depend on the people for their support, but for their labor they were to receive the grace of God, that they might wax strong in the Spirit." "They were all equal, and they did all labor, every man according to his strength." If any priest came to want, his needs were met out of the charity of the people, as the needs of any other needy soul were met.

The Book of Mormon makes a clear and reasonable distinction between priesthood and priestcraft, and forbids and condemns priestcraft in these words: "He commandeth that there shall be no priestcrafts, for behold, priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they may get gain and praise of the world." Priestcraft is the preaching of false doctrine for the sake of riches and honor; it is the serving and enriching of self, instead of serving the people.

The Book of Mormon contains some very wholesome counsel, and some beautiful passages on the subject of prayer. "If ye would hearken unto the spirit which teacheth a man to pray, ye would know that ye must pray .. Pray always and not faint." Amulek commands that we should pray over our flocks, our fields, our crops, our households; that we should pray for God's help against the power of our enemies, and against the power of the devil; that we should pray morning, noon, and night, in secret and in public; and that when we are not uttering vocal prayer, our hearts should be full and drawn out continually towards God.

The Book of Mormon speaks out against such sins as drunkenness, gluttony, and intemperance; against borrowing and not repaying; against profanity and blasphemy and careless use of the name of Deity; against stealing, robbing, and plundering; against murder; against lying; against idolatry. The Book of Mormon sternly and explicitly commands monogamy as the only system of marriage sanctioned by God, and condemns adultery, harlotry, concubinage, and whoredoms. Since we plan to devote a future sermon to "The Christian Ethics of Marriage," we shall dismiss that subject

rather hurriedly now with these two quotations: "Woe unto them who commit whoredoms, for they shall be thrust down to hell." And the words of Alma to Corianton, who forsook his priesthood and ministry to follow after a harlot: "Know ye not, my son, that these things are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all sins, save it be the shedding of innocent blood, or denying the Holy Ghost?"

The spiritual, ethical, and moral standards of the Book of Mormon are above reproach. In some instances, Book of Mormon statements on what is right and what is wrong are more pointed, clear, forceful, and unequivocal than any similar statement to be found in the Bible. The teachings of the Book of Mormon lead and entice men to do good, to worship and to serve God and Christ, to live in love and in peace with fellow-men, to pray always, to look to Christ for salvation. "Everything which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God." The way to judge is plain before you -- as plain as daylight from dark night. The Book of Mormon, which teaches the ways of God, is inspired by God. The Book of Mormon, which persuades men to believe in Christ, and gives a powerful testimony of his resurrection and his continuing life and deity, is sent forth by the gift and power of Christ. Can you afford to be without its wholesome counsel, its added testimony for the God and Christ you love and try to serve?