



Type: Magazine Article

Lesson XI. The Doctrine of Reward

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Source: *The Young Woman's Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 12 (December 1913),
pp. 764–768

Published by: Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association

Abstract: God will keep His promises—Review—Knowledge is important according to willingness to receive—Every man will be his own judge—The devil rewards no good thing—The doctrine of restoration applied to good works—The meaning of death and hell—Uncleanness cannot dwell in the presence of Christ—A memory gem.

GUIDE DEPARTMENT.

Teachings of the Book of Mormon.

LESSON XI.

THE DOCTRINE OF REWARD.

"For I will fulfill my promises which I have made unto the children of men, that I will do unto them while they are in the flesh."^a

So spake the Lord to the Nephites through His servant, the prophet Jacob. God has always been a true and reliable God. The Nephites understood Him to be so. They were taught always that God would keep His promises to them. If He threatened them with disaster, then disaster surely followed, unless they mended their ways. If He assured them prosperity and happiness, then these blessings came to them unless they departed from the path of righteousness.

And the Nephites were clearly taught in all the requirements of right-living. If any one of them fell into transgression, his sin could be accounted as disobedience. We have learned already how faith was required of the Nephites, and how it was counted to them for righteousness, when properly exercised. Faith alone, however, had no virtue. Faith must needs be coupled with good works. For men, taught the Nephite prophets, will be judged by their works. Moreover, those prophets declared that the Lord abhors the very semblance of sin. In the Nephite theology, therefore, there were very stringent laws against evil. Wickedness should be pun-

ished. At the same time, righteousness of life should be rewarded. All this and more has been pointed out in preceding lessons. In the present lesson, we shall learn further what the Book of Mormon teaches of the doctrine of rewards.

It was maintained by all the prophets of the Book of Mormon that a man could not repent unless he should sin, and that he could not sin unless there should be a law.^b In other words, it was well understood that where there is no law there is no sin. Objection might, therefore, be raised to some of the general assertions made in former lessons and in the introduction to this lesson. It might be urged, for example, that God has withheld knowledge of the Gospel from some persons, or from some nations, and that they are therefore innocent though they may live in sin. It appears, however, that, generally, a man's ignorance is the result of his own folly. At any rate, it was emphatically taught in Book of Mormon times, that the Lord God imparted knowledge to men according to their willingness to receive it. Thus it became possible for every one to learn the law and to walk in accordance therewith. Said Alma, in explanation of the principle of faith:

"I would that ye should remember

^aII Nephi 10:17.

^bAlma 42:17.

that God is merciful unto all who believe on His name; therefore He desireth, in the first place, that ye should believe, yea, even on His word. And now, He imparteth His word by angels, unto men; yea, not only men, but women also. Now this is not all; little children do have words given unto them many times which confound the wise and the learned."^c

Every individual then may learn for himself to know God's word. Every person—every man, every woman, and even every child—has the right to receive revelation for his own guidance. According to his faithfulness, the Lord will speak to him. According to his righteousness, the heavens will be opened to him.

What is true of individuals is relatively true of nations and peoples. Who has not heard echoing in the chambers of his soul that sublime cry of Alma's, "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."^d It is the yearning anxiety of the man of God to save his brethren from damnation. But the conscientious Alma recognizes at once, the wrongfulness of his ardent wish. "Behold, I am a man, and do sin in my wish," he says humbly. Why does he sin? "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 will; whether they be unto salvation or unto destruction. Yea, and I know that good and evil have come before all men; or 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."^e)

This statement of the case is very clear. All men have learned in some degree to know good from evil. With them sin is possible. To them light will be given according to their desires. All this is provided for in the just and merciful economy of the Father in heaven.

("Why," then, says Alma, "should I desire that I was 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.")^f)

This sublime doctrine is assuredly true. (It is for this reason that we believe that the great reformers and sincere religious workers of the world have been divinely inspired to do the work to which they have devoted their lives.) It is for this reason that we may claim that "good and evil have come before all men." It is for this reason that we may judge of the degree of preparedness of a community by the extent to which the word of God is received by it.

"It is given unto many to know the mysteries of God; nevertheless they are laid under a strict command, that they shall not impart only according to the portion of His word, which He doth grant unto the children of men; according to the heed and diligence which they give unto Him. And therefore he that will harden his heart, the same receiveth the lesser portion of the word; and he that will not harden his heart, to him is given the greater portion of the word,

^cAlma 32:22, 23.

^dAlma 29:1.

^eAlma 29:3-6.

^fAlma 29:7, 8.

until it is given unto him to know the mysteries of God, until he know them in full; and they that will harden their hearts, to them is given the lesser portion of the word, until they know nothing, concerning His mysteries and then they are taken captive by the devil, and led by his will down to destruction."^g

Thus does the Book of Mormon teach clearly that to every individual, and to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, the word of God will be given according to the desire to receive it. Thus does the sacred book set forth the doctrine of reward for faithfulness and righteousness in learning to know the mysteries of heaven.

Now, since the Book of Mormon teaches so explicitly that man may gain knowledge of God as fast—and as much—as he desires, and that, further, he will be rewarded according to his faithfulness in keeping the word of God, we may justly ask, Who is to be the judge of man's desire and of his faithfulness? Let it be always remembered that God is a just God. He does not take snap judgment upon man. Therefore, he has wisely provided that man shall be in large measure his own judge. Whatever good or bad shall come to him then he cannot but accept as justly awarded.

"Therefore prepare ye the way of the Lord, for the time is at hand that all men shall reap a reward of their works, according to that which they have been: if they have been righteous, they shall reap the salvation of their souls, according to the power and deliverance of Jesus Christ; and if they have been evil, they shall reap the damnation of their souls, according to the power and captivity of the devil.

"Now behold, this is the voice of the angel crying unto the people."^h

Elsewhere in his writings and

^gAlma 12:9-11.

^hAlma 9:28, 29.

sermons Alma states again the same great truth. "Every man receiveth wages from him whom he listeth to obey," we read in one place.ⁱ And in another place, this: "It is requisite with the justice of God, that men shall be judged according to their works * * * * for behold, they are their own judges, whether to do good or do evil."^j

Thus does the Book of Mormon make clear the doctrine of reward, that every man shall really be his own judge.

Specifically, the Book of Mormon sets forth clearly the punishment that follows evil of various kinds, and exhorts to all the virtues. We have not space here to enumerate either offenses or virtues. It must be enough to state the doctrine of reward in general terms. In a terrible vision, painful to his soul, Nephi saw the dire calamities that should befall his people. Distress was bound to come to them. Says Nephi, "Because they yield unto the devil, and choose works of darkness rather than light; therefore they must go down to hell."^k Indeed, in the words of the Nephite prophets nothing good can come of evil. Says Amulek, long after the time of Nephi, "Yea, and I also exhort you my brethren, that ye be watchful unto prayer continually, that ye may not be led away by the temptation of the devil, that he may not overpower you, that ye may not become his subjects at the last day: for behold, *he rewardeth you no good thing.*"^l

Righteousness, on the other hand, brings reward of blessings and all good things.

"Therefore, my son, see that ye are merciful unto your brethren; deal just-

ⁱAlma 3:27.

^jAlma 41:3-8.

^kII Nephi 26:10.

^lAlma 34:39.

ly. judge righteously, and do good continually; and if ye do all these things, then shall ye receive your reward: yea, ye shall have mercy restored unto you again; ye shall have justice restored unto you again; ye shall have a righteous judgment restored unto you again; and ye shall have good rewarded unto you again; for that which ye do send out shall return unto you again, and be restored; therefore, the word restoration more fully condemneth the sinner, and justifieth him not at all."^m

This is the doctrine of reward.

In this connection, the Book of Mormon makes clear a point that has troubled many men. The scriptures declare that death and hell shall give up their dead. What are death, and hell? In one of the wonderful, and sublime, passages to be found in the Book of Mormon, the inspired Nephi exclaims: "O how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster; yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body, and also the death of the spirit." Here is the key! By death is meant the physical, temporal death. The grave shall be forced to deliver up its dead. By hell is meant the spiritual death: "which spiritual death is hell." In the day of the resurrection, then, the grave must give up the captive bodies of men, and hell must release its captive spirits. Then shall the spirit and the body of man become again united,—a living soul. And in that day, "we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness; and the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment, and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness."ⁿ

Little more needs to be said of the

^mAlma 41:14, 15.

ⁿII Nephi 9:10-39; read the full reference.

doctrine of reward as presented in the Book of Mormon. It is clear and as rich in sparkling life as the running brook. For those who are wayward, or lack faith in the necessity of a righteous life, there is an excellent thought expressed by Mormon. It is this:

"Then will ye longer deny the Christ, or can ye behold the Lamb of God? Do ye suppose that ye shall dwell with him under a consciousness of your guilt? Do ye suppose that ye could be happy to dwell with that holy Being, when your souls are racked with a consciousness of guilt that ye have ever abused his laws? Behold, I say unto you, that ye would be more miserable to dwell with a holy and just God, under a consciousness of your filthiness before Him, than ye would to dwell with the damned souls in hell."^o

So declares the doctrine of reward.

Now, let every M. I. A. worker commit to memory this beautiful Nephite injunction, and cry it aloud in the world:

"O, my beloved brethren, remember the awfulness in transgressing against the Holy God, and also the awfulness of yielding to the enticings of that cunning one. *Remember, to be carnally minded is death, and to be spiritually minded is life eternal.*"^p

OUTLINE.

God will keep His promises—Review—Knowledge is important according to willingness to receive—Every man will be his own judge—The devil rewards no good thing—The doctrine of restoration applied to good works—The meaning of death and hell—Uncleanness cannot dwell in the presence of Christ—A memory gem.

QUESTIONS.

1. What does God say about His promises to the children of men?

^oMor. 9:2-5.

^pII Nephi 9:39.

2. How did the Nephites interpret this saying?
3. What was the attitude of the Nephite theology toward sin?
4. What was conceived to be the relation between sin and law?
5. What provisions were made that all might know the law?
6. What did Alma teach concerning each person's receiving the word of God?
7. Why did Alma wish that he were an angel?
8. Why was his wish wrong?
9. What provision had God already made that every nation might know His word?
10. How, then, should we look upon the world's great and good men?
11. How may we judge of the degree of faithfulness of a community?
12. Quote Alma to prove the above.
13. Who is to judge of man's desire for knowledge and of his faithfulness?
14. Quote passages to prove the above.
15. Relate Nephi's vision of the dire calamities to befall his people.
16. Compare Nephi's vision with the words of Amulek.
17. How does the devil reward?
18. How is righteousness rewarded?
19. What is meant by death and hell?
20. How will the unrighteous feel in the presence of righteousness?
21. Repeat the memory gem.

XII.

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE.

In the last moments of his mortal life, while He suffered exquisite agony on the cross, the Savior of the world delivered a strange message that has puzzled the learned of the world ever since. Two malefactors were crucified with the Lord. One of them cursed the suffering Jesus and reviled Him, railing at Him thus: "Art not Thou the Christ? Save Thyself and us." The other sinner, however, was a man in whom the fear of God had found lodgment. He rebuked his fellow, saying, "Dost thou not even fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due rewards of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss." Then, having thus voluntarily confessed his misdeeds, the sinner addressed Jesus and said, "Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." And Jesus, the great physician, comforted the malefactor thus: "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in Paradise."^a

^aLuke 23:39-43.

In the Christian world, these strange, compassionate words spoken by the dying Savior have come to mean that if one would only confess the supremacy of Jesus, even on the deathbed, one should be saved without further ado in the kingdom of God. Paradise has been confused with heaven. It is argued that the believer goes immediately after death into the very presence of the Father. But another peculiar scripture upsets this doctrine. On the third day after His crucifixion, Jesus rose from death in immortality of life. In the garden near the empty tomb Mary Magdalene found Him in the early morning. When she recognized Him, she cried "Rabboni," and would have touched Him; but Jesus forbade her. "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father."^b Where, then, had Jesus been? Had He not kept His word to the malefactor? Had He failed on the terrible day of the crucifixion to meet the sinner in paradise? Modern Christian theol-

^bJohn 20:11-18.