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FAITH UNTO REPENTANCE

THE FULNESS OF THE SIMPLE WAY

Jennifer C. Lane

*T*HE BOOK OF MORMON REPEATEDLY warns against rejecting a simple path to salvation. Let us look very briefly at a few of these warnings. Nephi taught his brothers about the bronze serpent lifted up by Moses, saying that “after they were bitten he prepared a way that they might be healed; and the labor which they had to perform was to look; and because of the simpleness of the way, or the easiness of it, there were many who perished” (1 Nephi 17:41). We see here that being healed by looking can be simply too easy to believe. The same problem is evident in Alma’s description to the poor Zoramites: “A type was raised up in the wilderness, that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live. . . . But there were many who were so hardened that they would not look, therefore they perished. Now the reason they would not look is because they did not believe that it would heal them” (Alma 33:19–20). Here again we learn that the Israelites’ being healed was only dependent on their having the faith to look. They

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did not look “because they did not believe that it would heal them.” The simpleness of the way was a stumbling block.

In the book of Helaman, Nephi explained that the image of the bronze serpent is a parallel to Christ’s atonement. “Yea, did he [Moses] not bear record that the Son of God should come? And as he lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so shall he be lifted up who should come” (Helaman 8:14). Nephi teaches that it is in looking to Christ that we will live. “And as many as should look upon that serpent should live, even so as many as should look upon the Son of God with faith, having a contrite spirit, might live, even unto that life which is eternal” (Helaman 8:15).

In our own days we have also received warnings against relying on our abilities rather than looking to Christ. In 1988, Elder Oaks warned of one trend in contemporary Christian thought that emphasizes being “reconciled to God entirely through [one’s] own righteousness.” He then asked, “Are Latter-day Saints susceptible to such heresies? The Apostle Paul wrote that we should ‘work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling.’ (Philippians 2:12.) Could that familiar expression mean that the sum total of our own righteousness will win us salvation and exaltation? Could some of us believe that our heavenly parentage and our divine destiny allow us to pass through mortality and attain eternal life solely on our own merits? On the basis of what I have heard, I believe that some of us, some of the time, say things that can create that impression. We can forget that keeping the commandments, which is necessary, is not sufficient.”¹

The Book of Mormon testifies of the good news that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, but it also clarifies this central principle of the gospel by teaching that “if [we] believe on his name [we] will repent of all [our] sins” (Helaman 14:13). The Book of Mormon dissolves the false dichotomy between faith and works. Its doctrine of faith unto repentance shows us how we can and must focus on faith in Jesus Christ. The Book of Mormon teaches the doctrine of faith unto repentance by both precept and example, showing that the “fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ” is truly the simple way (D&C 20:9).

The Book of Mormon further testifies of the simple way by teaching that we can only be saved through Christ. We learn that we are in “in a lost and in a fallen state, and ever would be save [we] should rely on this Redeemer” (1 Nephi 10:6). The Book of Mormon explains that we can choose between good and evil and that God’s law shows us which way to go, but at the same time it stresses that our individual efforts inevitably fail and we end up being cut off from God. Lehi explains our need to rely on Christ, saying that “by the law no flesh is justified; or, by the law men are cut off. . . . and also, by the spiritual law they perish from that which is good, and become miserable forever” (2 Nephi 2:5). He makes it clear that “there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah” (2 Nephi 2:8).

By emphasizing our fallen state, the Book of Mormon teaches that our faith cannot be in our ability to obey the law by ourselves but in Christ and His atonement. Abindai explains that “salvation doth not come by the law alone; and were it not for the atonement . . . they must unavoidably perish, notwithstanding the law of Moses” (Mosiah 13:28, 32). The Book of Mormon makes our dependence on Christ clear, but it also stresses that choosing Christ is up to us. It clarifies what it means to rely on Christ, be saved by faith in Christ, and it teaches the intrinsic and organic connection between our faith and our actions. My focus in this chapter will be the repentance, or change of heart, that faith in Christ will produce in us. I will first discuss the Book of Mormon doctrine of faith unto repentance and then look at Book of Mormon examples of how faith produces the change of heart which leads to repentance.

FAITH UNTO REPENTANCE: A BOOK OF MORMON DOCTRINE

In the Book of Mormon, the fulness of the doctrine of faith is clearly and simply expressed. I will examine the doctrine as taught by Samuel the Lamanite, Alma the Younger, and Mormon. The most basic expression of what faith produces is found in the teachings of

Samuel the Lamanite. From his place on the city wall, he taught the hardened Nephites, “If ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins” (Helaman 14:13). Samuel explains that if we have faith then we will repent—the two are inseparable. This “if-then” relationship also makes clear that if we do not repent it is because we do not have faith in Christ, we do not “believe on his name.” Our choice to believe on the atonement of Christ gives us the desire to change “that thereby ye may have a remission of them [your sins] through his merits” (Helaman 14:13). Faith in Christ produces repentance.

Alma the Younger develops the connection of faith and repentance by explaining that we must exercise faith unto repentance. This doctrine expands on the teaching of Samuel the Lamanite, in that it is belief in Christ, not ourselves, that will produce this change in us. Alma testifies that, through the Atonement, Christ “shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name” (Alma 34:15). Just like Samuel the Lamanite, Alma also focuses on believing “on His name.” Believing on Christ’s name may look too easy to qualify us for salvation, but we can understand the process better when we see that Christ’s name refers to His nature and His ability to change us through the power of the Atonement.² When we have faith in His name and His power, we experience a change of heart.

Alma explains that Christ suffered for us in order to bring “about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance” (Alma 34:15). The “means” for faith unto repentance comes from Christ’s atonement. It is a means for a change of action, a change of feeling, and a change of nature. It is not faith in ourselves, but confidence and faith in His deliverance.³ We do not have the means within ourselves to produce the profound change of repentance.

While stressing that we cannot save ourselves, Alma also clarifies that Christ does not act upon us, choosing us despite ourselves. Our response to the Atonement is the deciding factor. To describe this response, Alma uses the term “exercise,” suggesting an action or choice. Alma teaches that “he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice” (Alma 34:16). Faith here is not something you have as much as something that you do.⁴ We have been offered mercy, but we have to choose to

accept it. God will not force it upon us. Choosing mercy is choosing to believe on Christ's name and His power to redeem us. This choice is the simple way, and it is the only way. Alma explains that "only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption" (Alma 34:16). As we believe on His name, we will repent of our sins. As we do so, we are saved, not in our sins, but from our sins (see Helaman 5:10; Alma 11:34, 37). Through faith unto repentance, we gain access to mercy and the plan of redemption.

Alma exhorts us to follow this simple way, saying, "Exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have mercy upon you" (Alma 34:17). Alma explains that calling upon His holy name is how we exercise faith unto repentance. It is not hard; it just takes faith and a contrite heart (see Helaman 8:14–15). With faith unto repentance, we will "call upon his holy name" for mercy (Alma 34:17). We act upon our faith and ask for His help. This is how salvation comes to those who believe on His name (see Alma 34:15).

The doctrine of faith unto repentance is further clarified in the teaching of the prophet Mormon in Helaman chapter 3. Like both Samuel the Lamanite and Alma the Younger, Mormon emphasizes the need to "call upon His holy name." He teaches that "the Lord is merciful unto all who will, in the sincerity of their hearts, call upon his holy name" (Helaman 3:27). With faith and a contrite heart, we put our trust in Christ's power to save us, call upon His holy name, and recognize our need for help. In Mormon's words, we call "in the sincerity of [our] hearts" (Helaman 3:27). A parallel to calling upon His name is found the next verse: "Yea, thus we see that the gate of heaven is open unto all, even to those who will believe on the name of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God" (Helaman 3:28). This parallel explains that if we believe, we will call to Him; we will exercise our faith in Him. Mormon teaches that calling upon His name will open "the gate of heaven," and the Book of Mormon illustrates how this simple doctrine works in the lives of individuals and groups. Having reviewed how the doctrine of faith

unto repentance was taught, I will now turn to examples illustrating how it was lived.

FAITH UNTO REPENTANCE:
BOOK OF MORMON EXAMPLES

The Book of Mormon gives repeated examples of what faith produces as people call upon Christ's name for mercy. I will review the process of faith unto repentance in the lives of Alma the Younger, his father, Alma, the people of King Benjamin, the people of Ammon, and the Nephites in the era shortly before the coming of Christ. These examples illustrate how faith in Christ's atonement produces repentance in the lives of individuals and groups of people. This repentance can be seen both in choosing to turn to God as well as continuing on that path over time.

The Book of Mormon picture of repentance matches the Old Testament and New Testament sense of the word as a change of heart, mind, and action.⁵ In Hebrew the verb translated "repent" means to turn, and in Greek the term describes a change of mind and heart. The Book of Mormon illustrates how repentance can be seen as both turning to God in calling upon the name of Christ and producing a change of heart by faith unto repentance.

One of the classic experiences of faith unto repentance is Alma the Younger's conversion. In the Book of Mormon we have three different accounts of his choice to "call upon [Christ's] holy name" (Alma 34:17). In Mosiah chapter 27, Alma's first words after he awakens are: "I have repented of my sins, and have been redeemed of the Lord" (Mosiah 27:24). The process of faith unto repentance is more fully described in the retrospective account in Alma 36. In this chapter we see that Alma's faith unto repentance produces both a freedom from guilt and a change of heart.⁶

To his son Helaman, Alma describes how he exercised faith by calling on the name of Christ for mercy: "I cried within my heart: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me" (Alma 36:18). He then describes the forgiveness aspect of repentance, saying that "when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more" (Alma 36:19).

Alma's faith also produced a change in his heart so that "from that time even until now, I have labored without ceasing, that I might bring souls unto repentance" (Alma 36:24). Alma's repentance is shown here to be both a freedom from guilt and a change of nature resulting from his choice to exercise faith in the atonement of Christ.

Alma gives another witness of this process of faith unto repentance in his testimony to his son Shiblon. He recounts that "never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins. But behold, I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul" (Alma 38:8). Alma explains "that there is no other way or means whereby man can be saved, only in and through Christ" (Alma 38:9). This is Alma's testimony that Christ is the only way and that crying unto Him for mercy leads to deliverance.

Another important and pivotal example of faith unto repentance as a change of heart can be found in the story of the conversion of Alma the Younger's father, Alma. In the passages about Alma we again see how a change of heart comes from faith in Christ and His atonement, not our own willpower. The power of the simple way is related as Alma the Younger is teaching the people of Zarahemla. He refers back to the experiences of the previous generation and reminds the people that "according to his [Alma's] faith there was a mighty change wrought in his heart" (Alma 5:12). Alma then tells how his father's faith unto repentance led to a change of heart in those he taught by the waters of Mormon: "And behold, he preached the word unto your fathers, and a mighty change was also wrought in their hearts, and they humbled themselves and put their trust in the true and living God. And behold, they were faithful until the end; therefore they were saved" (Alma 5:13). Just as Alma the Younger had been changed by faith in Christ and shared that experience with others, the identical experience of a previous generation testifies of the simpleness of the way.

Another group that was brought to repentance through their faith in Christ was the people of King Benjamin. These chapters of the Book of Mosiah contain what is perhaps the most clearly

described effect of faith unto repentance for a group of people. In this account we see again how the exercise of faith in Christ brings a repentance that includes both forgiveness and a change of heart. In addition, these chapters clearly illustrate the role of the Spirit of the Lord in bringing this change through the atoning blood of Christ.

The process began when, after hearing the teaching of King Benjamin and recognizing their fallen state, the people cried aloud, “O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ” (Mosiah 4:2). In response to their exercise of faith unto repentance, the Holy Spirit came, and “they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ” (Mosiah 4:3). King Benjamin continued to teach them, and they further described the sanctifying change of heart that was brought about by their faith: “The Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, that we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). Faith in Christ’s atonement brought this people to a repentance that included both forgiveness and a mighty change of heart.

Another description of faith unto repentance as a change of heart can be seen in the experience of the people of Ammon, also known as the Anti-Nephi-Lehies. The dramatic and lasting change they experienced also illustrates how faith leads to the choice to “call upon His holy name.” Ammon taught King Lamoni about the Fall and the plan of redemption and, recognizing his fallen state, King Lamoni exercised his faith unto repentance, saying, “O Lord, have mercy; according to thy abundant mercy which thou hadst had upon the people of Nephi, have upon me, and my people” (Alma 18:41). After having fallen to the earth and later reviving, King Lamoni shared his experience of a change of heart with his people. Yet again the people’s faith produced repentance: “As many as heard his [King Lamoni’s] words believed, and were converted unto the Lord” (Alma 19:31). The people’s belief was an exercise of faith that brought forth the fruit of repentance.

This passage also offers us an interesting parallel of belief and unbelief. Those who were converted were not changed merely because they happened to hear. Instead, their “hearing” King Lamoni suggests a choice because there were also others who “would not hear his words” and “went their way” (Alma 19:32). “Hearing” the words of testimony is, like believing, a matter of faith and choice. Those who chose to hear and to believe were converted. They declared “that their hearts had been changed; that they had no more desire to do evil” (Alma 19:33). Faith unto repentance produced a mighty change of heart.

While most of these accounts focus on a particular moment in time, the Book of Mormon both shows and teaches that faith unto repentance is a sustained process. Faith always drives the process of repentance, and it is a lifelong endeavor. The need for sustained faith to produce repentance can be seen in Alma the Younger’s analogy of the tree that grows from the seed of faith in Christ’s atonement (see Alma 33:20–23). He explains that “if ye will nourish the word, yea, nourish the tree as it beginneth to grow, by your faith with great diligence, and with patience, looking forward to the fruit thereof, it shall take root; and behold it shall be a tree springing up unto everlasting life” (Alma 32:41). Nourishing the tree is done “by your faith.” That faith is, however, exercised with diligence and patience because the process of growing up unto everlasting life is a lifelong process.

This diligence and patience in exercising faith was illustrated by the Nephites in an unusually successful period of humility. In Alma chapter 62 we find a description of a time in which Nephite prosperity did not lead them to pride. They “were not lifted up in the pride of their eyes; neither were they slow to remember the Lord their God; but they did humble themselves exceedingly before him” (Alma 62:49). They remembered their fallen state by acknowledging that they had been delivered, and they exercised their faith by praying “unto the Lord their God continually” (Alma 62:51). Repentance was continual because faith was continual. The diligence and patience of calling upon His name is shown here to be a never-ceasing process.

The same long-term exercise of faith unto repentance is illustrated by some of the Nephites at a time of great division among the people. Many members of the Church were prideful and persecuted their brethren (see Helaman 3:33–34). Those who remained humble did so through their choice to exercise their faith unto repentance. We see that “they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of their hearts, which sanctification cometh because of their yielding their hearts unto God” (Helaman 3:35). Their continued dependence on Christ produced in them a change of heart. Their prideful brethren may have at one time exercised faith unto repentance, but, as Alma asks, “If ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?” (Alma 5:26). It is easy to feel as though our spiritual progress is a result of our own strength and wisdom, that it has been achieved through our willpower rather than our faith unto repentance. Christ warns us that “ye must watch and pray always lest ye enter into temptation; for Satan desireth to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. Therefore ye must always pray unto the Father in my name” (3 Nephi 18:18–19). Calling upon the name of Christ allows us to grow stronger in our humility and firmer in the faith of Christ. Faith unto repentance requires that we continually choose to look and live.

CONCLUSION

Through these and many other examples, the Book of Mormon illustrates the simple way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It teaches the fulness of the gospel by clarifying the connection between real faith in Christ and repentance. Faith is not merely a mental or verbal acknowledgment of Christ. True faith will lead us to call upon the name of Christ for mercy. This is not a call to be saved *in* our sins, but *from* our sins (see Helaman 5:10). As we exercise our faith in Christ, we experience repentance which includes

both forgiveness and a change of heart. The Book of Mormon also makes clear that repentance is inseparably connected to baptism, obedience, and sanctification (see Moroni 8:25–26). When we have faith, we will repent; and when we repent, we will obey and follow Christ.

These changes in behavior directly stem from our faith in Christ and His atoning sacrifice. President Boyd K. Packer has emphasized that “the study of the doctrines of the gospel will improve behavior quicker than talking about behavior will improve behavior.”⁷ The key doctrines of the Fall and the Atonement are taught more clearly in the Book of Mormon than in any other book of scripture. President Ezra Taft Benson explained that “in the Book of Mormon we will find the fulness of those doctrines required for our salvation. And they are taught plainly and simply so that even children can learn the ways of salvation and exaltation.”⁸ I believe that one of these plain and simple doctrines taught in the Book of Mormon is the fulness of what it means to be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. With the Book of Mormon’s clarification of the doctrine of faith unto repentance, we can wholeheartedly embrace being saved by faith, confident that our focus on developing faith in Christ will produce repentance and bring forth the fruit of eternal life.

Through the Book of Mormon we learn that we need a Savior and that when we exercise faith in His redemption, we will repent. When we truly understand both our lost and fallen condition and His redeeming power, we can begin to exercise our faith. We are then in a position to call upon His name for help to make changes in our life. These changes are not easy, and they come gradually over time. As we “fast and pray oft,” we will “wax stronger and stronger in [our] humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ” (Helaman 3:35). Our faith unto repentance will lead to a mighty change of heart, “yea, even to the purifying and the sanctification of [our] hearts, which sanctification cometh because of [our] yielding their hearts unto God” (Helaman 3:35). Christ came to save us from our sins. When we truly believe that He can loose our bonds, we will exercise our faith and step out of captivity. Like the Israelites in

the wilderness, when we have faith to look upon the Son of God, we will find a healing power that will lift us up to life eternal.

NOTES

1. Dallin H. Oaks, "What Think Ye of Christ?" *Ensign*, November 1988, 66–67. This hesitation to emphasize faith and salvation through Christ has changed during the last two decades. In later comments Elder Oaks documented the problem and noted that a change of focus within the Church has come and will come from President Benson's call for a renewed emphasis on the Book of Mormon (see Dallin H. Oaks, "Another Testament of Jesus Christ," *Ensign*, March 1994, 60–67).

2. On the ancient Near Eastern connection of name and nature, see Bruce H. Porter and Stephen D. Ricks, "Names in Antiquity: Old, New, and Hidden," in *By Study and also by Faith*, vol. 1, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1990), 501–4. A discussion of the connection of Christ's name and His atonement can be found in Elder Neal A. Maxwell's *Lord, Increase Our Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 9–17. He observes, "Without full faith in Jesus as mankind's rescuing Messiah, we also will lack faith in His capacity to rescue us individually and to help us daily" (10).

3. The difference is illustrated in this comment by Elder A. Theodore Tuttle: "We're not going to survive in this world, temporally or spiritually, without increased faith in the Lord—and I don't mean a positive mental attitude—I mean downright solid faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the one thing that gives vitality and power to otherwise rather weak individuals" ("Developing Faith," *Ensign*, November 1986, 73).

4. In the *Lectures on Faith* we learn that faith is a "principle of action" (Joseph Smith, comp., *Lectures on Faith* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985], 3).

5. See Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Repentance." For an additional discussion of vocabulary see, for example, David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. "Repentance."

6. This distinction of the freedom from guilt and the change of heart can be seen as justification, the immediate result of being forgiven, and sanctification, the long-term process of being made holy and having a change of nature. A recent discussion of justification and sanctification can be found in Elder D. Todd Christofferson's article "Justification and Sanctification," *Ensign*, June 2001, 18–25.

7. Boyd K. Packer, "Washed Clean," *Ensign*, May 1997, 9.

8. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion," *Ensign*, November 1986, 6. President Benson noted that "the Lord Himself has

stated that the Book of Mormon contains the ‘fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ’ (D&C 20:9).” He explained that ‘ful’ is “does not mean it contains every teaching, every doctrine ever revealed. Rather, it means that . . . the Book of Mormon offers so much that broadens our understandings of the doctrines of salvation. Without it, much of what is taught in other scriptures would not be nearly so plain and precious” (“The Book of Mormon—Keystone of Our Religion,” *Ensign*, November 1986, 6). This is particularly true in understanding the connection of faith and repentance.