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Chapter LXXVII

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CHAPTER LXXVII.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE AMONG THE NEPHITES—TREATMENT OF THE UNREPENTANT—THE WORD OF THE LORD REGARDING TRANSGRESSORS—THE TESTIMONY OF MORONI.

AS IN other things, the methods adopted in the Nephite Church in the treatment of those who turned from righteousness were identical with those pursued in such cases in the Church of God in other lands and in other ages. The erring ones were first labored with by the officers of the church in the spirit of love and reconciliation; they were visited by the Priests and Teachers; and if they repented they were continued in the fellowship of the Saints; but if they were obdurate and impenitent they were severed from the communion of the church. This course was pursued throughout their history from the days of Alma, the elder, to those of Moroni.

In the land of Zarahemla, when Mosiah was king and Alma was high priest, there was much hard-heartedness and evil doing in the midst of the Nephites. It may be remembered it was at this time that the sons of Mosiah, and the younger Alma, were leaders among those who were opposing the church and persecuting its members. The iniquity that existed with those who had made covenant with God, or were their children, caused Alma much pain and anxiety. The Priests and Teachers labored frequently in vain, and the presiding priesthood were in doubt with regard to the best course to pursue with the wicked. They had no precedents to guide them, for such a state of things had never before existed among the Nephites.

Alma applied to the king, but he refused to judge the offenders. He would not meddle in matters of church discipline, that he left to Alma; and to him he returned those who had transgressed the law of the Lord. In this dilemma Alma appealed with all his heart to the Lord, and inquired what he should do in the matter: for he was most desirous to do right in the sight of heaven. Then the voice of the Lord came to him saying:

Because thou hast inquired of me, concerning the transgressor, thou art blessed.

Thou art my servant; and I covenant with thee, that thou shalt have eternal life; and thou shalt serve me, and go forth in my name, and shalt gather together my sheep.

And he that will hear my voice shall be my sheep; and him ye shall receive into the church, and him will I also receive.

For behold, this is my church; whosoever is baptized, shall be baptized unto repentance. And whosoever ye receive shall believe in my name; and him will I freely forgive.

For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them; and it is I that granteth unto him that believeth unto the end, a place at my right hand.

For behold, in my name are they called; and if they know me they shall come forth, and shall have a place eternally at my right hand.

And it shall come to pass that when the second trump shall sound, then shall they that never knew me come forth and shall stand before me;

And then shall they know that I am the Lord

their God, that I am their Redeemer; but they would not be redeemed.

And then will I confess unto them that I never knew them; and they shall depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.

Therefore I say unto you, that he that will not hear my voice, the same shall ye not receive into my church, for him I will not receive at the last day;

Therefore I say unto you, Go; and whosoever transgresseth against me, him shall ye judge according to the sins which he has committed; and if he confess his sins before thee and me, and repenteth in the sincerity of his heart, him shall ye forgive, and I will forgive him also;

Yea, and as often as my people repent, will I forgive them their trespasses against me.

And ye shall also forgive one another your trespasses; for verily I say unto you, He that forgiveth not his neighbor's trespasses, when he says that he repents, the same hath brought himself under condemnation.

Now I say unto you, Go; and whosoever will not repent of his sins, the same shall not be numbered among my people; and this shall be observed from this time forward.

The sacred historian continues:

And it came to pass when Alma had heard these words, he wrote them down that he might have them, and that he might judge the people of that church, according to the commandments of God.

And it came to pass that Alma went and judged those that had been taken in iniquity, according to the word of the Lord.

And whosoever repented of their sins and did con-

fess them, then he did number among the people of the church;

And those that would not confess their sins and repent of their iniquity, the same were not numbered among the people of the church, and their names were blotted out.

In this revelation we have the word of the Lord to guide the Nephite Church throughout all its dispensations.

The same spirit is manifested in the instructions given by the Redeemer in his teachings to the Nephites.* They are full of love, mercy and patience. On the other hand, they shew that the Church of God must not be defiled by countenancing iniquity or permitting that which is holy to be handled by the unworthy. Nearly four hundred years later, Moroni, speaking on church government says:

And they were strict to observe that there should be no iniquity among them; and whoso was found to commit iniquity, and three witnesses of the church did condemn them before the Elders; and if they repented not, and confessed not, their names were blotted out, and they were not numbered among the people of Christ;

But as oft as they repented, and sought forgiveness, with real intent, they were forgiven.

From these quotations we perceive that the spirit of the ancient church on this continent, with regard to offenses and offenders, was uniform in all its dispensations and identical in its methods with those of the latter days.

* See Chapter xlix.