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A Nephite's Commandments to His Three Sons, III— Corianton

Author(s): B. H. Roberts

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Abstract: The story of Alma the Younger's conversion. Just before he died, he delivered to his sons Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton his "commandments," a father's advice and admonitions. Each son is different, and therefore Alma's advice was different for each of his sons. The third part covers Corianton.

A NEPHITE'S COMMANDMENTS TO HIS THREE SONS.

BY B. H. ROBERTS.

III—CORIANTON.

I.

In Corianton we have a character altogether different from the other sons of Alma—Helaman and Shiblon, Corianton's elder brothers. So different, indeed, that one marvels that they can be children of the same father. The marked difference leads one almost to ask: Can the same fountain send forth both sweet water and bitter? Can one tree bear both bad and good fruit? How is it that the tame Olive tree bears wild fruit? That is, how does it come to pass that good parents, wise, noble and honorable fathers, sometimes seem cursed with worthless sons? These questions are easy to ask, but difficult to answer, unless we say that the figures of speech used in the questions above do not meet, even for purposes of illustration, the phenomenon of a righteous father begetting a son whose every inclination seems bent towards evil. Such a father is not as a good fountain sending forth sweet and bitter water; nor a tree bearing both bad and good fruit. Such sons are not as bitter waters from a sweet fountain, nor as bad fruit from a good tree. By which I mean, that the earthly father, good or bad, is not the primary source from whence comes the character of his son. He does not create that character, neither does the mother. Modify it they may. Impress some characteristics upon it, physical or

mental, they do. They fix upon it doubtless some impressions peculiar to themselves, for large observation and the experience of the race confirms the fact; but create the character of son or daughter wholly, or even primarily, never. At most, parentage but modifies character, it never creates it. Men who come to this earth are what they are primarily by reason of what they *were* in that existence before they tabernacled in the flesh.

Man, by which I mean not the fleshly tabernacle in which the real man lives—but the being who possesses the aggregation of qualities making up the intelligence and character of *the* man, the true man, the “art-man” or “ah-man;” he was not created, he was not made, but is eternal as God is; and is what he is, by virtue of the innate qualities of his nature modified by the cycles of experiences through which he has passed before he reached earth; modified by his earth parentage, too, among other things; but not created by that. Not all the modifying influences of earth parentage can remove the characteristics possessed by the spirit before his birth; and there may be some characteristics not touched at all by the influences of earth parentage. Hence we have Cain born to Adam; and than Adam, perhaps, none has been more righteous; Ham born to Noah; Ishmael, to Abraham; Esau, to Isaac; Reuben, to Jacob; Absalom, to David—nay, David himself to Jesse; Laman and Lemuel, to Lehi; Corianton, to Alma. And why to the virtuous are often born the vicious, we know not, but doubtless for some wise purpose, and perhaps because of relationships and compacts existing in the pre-existent life, not now known to us.

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Corianton was different, I say, from both Helaman and Shiblon. He was doubtless quick of intellect, though really of less intellectual power than his older brothers. Smart, I should say, rather than wise; brilliant, rather than profound; moved by impulse instead of reason; and governed by feeling rather than by a sound judgment. As a result of such a combination of qualities he was evidently vain and self-sufficient, impatient of restraint, and sought to walk independently of the experience, counsels and sounder judgment of his older brethren. Moreover, he was not more than half convinced of the truth of the Gospel. On a number of leading and fundamental doctrines he was skeptical. He

evidently had enough knowledge to doubt, but not enough to believe. At the Pierian spring he had evidently taken shallow draughts—enough to intoxicate the brain; but had not yet taken the deeper draught, that would sober him. For it was as true then as it is now, that a little learning, a little philosophy, inclines men's hearts to skepticism, but larger learning, and depth of philosophy inclines men's hearts to faith. That the possession of such qualities of mind, and following their natural bent, would lead Corianton into serious trouble, especially when not counter-poised by the influence of a profound faith in God and the restraints of the Gospel, might easily have been predicted; and so indeed, it came to pass.

In the early days of the Nephite republic, one Zoram turned away from the Gospel as known to the Nephites, and founded an apostate sect which took his name, that is, they were called Zoramites. They had gathered together in a land bordering on the east sea-shore, south of the land Jershon, inhabited by the people of Ammon, be it remembered, while immediately on their south border was the land most densely populated by the Lamanites. The land the Zoramites inhabited they called Antionum. In addition to the desire Alma had for the salvation of the souls of these dissenters from the Nephite faith, was also the fear that they, on occasion, would open negotiations with their near neighbors on the south, the Lamanites, and inaugurate another war against the republic; for it was a characteristic of all apostates from the Nephites—when the latter themselves were righteous and in the faith of the Gospel—that sooner or later they joined the Lamanites, and stirred them up to war against the Nephites. Thus, in the western hemisphere as in the eastern, before the coming of the Messiah as afterwards, the Gospel brought not peace but a sword: and then as since, however, the sword was found in the hands of the unbelieving and not in the hands of the Saints, except in defense of their own lives and liberties. Both these incentives, then, a desire to save the souls of the Zoramites, and also to prevent them forming an alliance with the Lamanites, led Alma to undertake a mission among them for their conversion. On this mission he was accompanied by his sons Shiblon and Corianton, several of the sons of Mosiah, and Amulek and Zeezrom. It was unfortunate for Corianton that the teachings of the Zoram-

ites were calculated to foster his own doubts, and strengthen his own unbelief, while their aristocratic manner of life and their exclusiveness and pride, would suit the tendencies of his own vain and shallow nature. How much contact with the Zoramites contributed to the skepticism of Corianton, or how much of that he brought with him when entering their land, may not be determined; but in their midst, he found a congenial atmosphere for the growth of his unbelief, and the gratification of his vanity. The humility required of a minister of Christ had become irksome to him. Some success perhaps in preaching the word—for it often happens that such natures as Corianton's have a gift of speech that captivates, and gives a show of brilliancy and wisdom which is not really theirs—led him to boast of his own strength and his wisdom.

Pride ever goeth before a fall, and a haughty spirit, before destruction. The measure of the Spirit of God which hitherto had accompanied Corianton, notwithstanding his disposition and follies, now departed from him. He became infatuated with the beauty, and fell a victim to the wiles, of a harlot named Isabel, and followed her into Siron, a land bordering on the possessions of the Lamanites. How long he staid there, what folly he was guilty of, to what extent he sinned, what circumstances led to his awakening, by what means he was induced to join again his sorrow-stricken father and brother, we do not know. But that he did break away from the spell of the siren, that he did return to his duty, and join his missionary companions, and afterwards became active and useful in the ministry, is true. However deep his transgression, he evidently did not become hardened in sin, nor lost to the blessed influence of repentance. But whether that repentance came about by discovering the hollowness of Isabel's protestations of love—her disgusting sensuality, and the unsatisfying nature of sinful pleasures—or whether the remembered sorrow of a distracted father, who was reviled by the Zoramites because of the waywardness of his son; the stoning of his brother Shiblón in the streets of the chief city of the Zoramites, and his subsequent imprisonment—whether it was one or the other of these series of facts, or both of them combined, that turned him from his evil course, or the wonderful and effectual working of the grace of God in response to the fervent prayers of a

righteous father, that wrought the good thing, one may not know; but turn away from the evil course he did; and now our chief concern is to know what "commandments," that is, what counsels would a father give to such a son, just snatched as a brand from the burning.

First of all, he begins by setting before Corianton the enormity of his sin; yet he approaches the subject skilfully, like the great teacher he is. His tone is gentle, for he is in sympathy with the young man, however much he may despise his sin—

I have somewhat more to say to thee than what I said unto thy brother [Shiblon]: for behold, have ye not observed the steadiness of thy brother, his faithfulness, and his diligence in keeping the commandments of God? Behold, has he not set a good example for thee?

A noble exordium this, and worthy the matter to follow. Here we have a gentle reproof for the past, and an object lesson pointed out in the steadfastness of the elder brother; and when Alma exalted the quality of "steadfastness" as exhibited in the noble character of Shiblon, he probed to the very bottom of the weakness in Corianton's character. The father continues:

Thou didst not give so much heed unto my words as did thy brother, among the people of the Zoramites. Now this is what I have against thee; thou didst go on unto boasting in thy strength and thy wisdom. And this is not all, my son. Thou didst do that which was grievous unto me: for thou didst forsake the ministry, and did go over into the land of Siron, among the borders of the Lamanites, after the harlot Isabel; yea, she did steal away the hearts of many; but this was no excuse for thee, my son. Thou shouldst have tended to the ministry wherewith thou wast entrusted. 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? For behold, if ye deny the Holy Ghost when it once has had place in you, and ye know that ye deny it, behold, this is a sin which is unpardonable: yea, and whosoever murdereth against the light and knowledge of God, it is not easy for him to obtain forgiveness; yea, I say unto you, my son, that it is not easy for him to obtain a forgiveness. And now, my son, I would to God that ye had not been guilty of so great a crime. I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, if it were not for your good. But behold, ye cannot hide

your crimes from God; and except ye repent, they will stand as a testimony against you at the last day. Now my son, I would that ye would repent and forsake your sins, and go no more after the lusts of your eyes, but cross yourself in all these things; for except ye do this, ye can in no wise inherit the kingdom of God. Oh, remember, and take it upon you, and cross yourself in these things.

This is a masterly probing of the young man's sin. No trifling here, yet how full of love is this—"I would not dwell upon your crimes, to harrow up your soul, *if it were not for your good*"! And then the justification of this thoroughness of treatment—"Ye cannot hide your crimes from God; and except ye repent, they will stand against you at the last day." What's the use of shuffling then? Be sure of it, God will not be mocked. A man's sin will find him out, here or hereafter, and if unatoned for, or unrepented of, the sinner must face and answer the just demands of God's moral law; there's no escape. "Some men's sins go beforehand to judgment, and some men they follow after," but come to judgment they will.

The whole of the father's indictment against the son, however, is not in yet. There are other evils and faults of character to be dealt with. This slip with Isabel is but an incident in his life—scarlet it may be, and a blotch that will remain a blotch, for what deep wound ever healed without a scar? Still, it is but an incident; and there yet remained in the young man the characteristics capable of producing another such incident, and yet another, until adown the steep sides of demoralization the young man might plunge to his utter ruin. The inclination to pride, self-sufficiency, arrogance, love of luxury which riches bring—all this must be corrected, and hence, Alma continues:

And I command you to take it upon you to counsel your elder brothers in your undertakings; for behold, thou art in thy youth, and ye stand in need to be nourished by your brothers. And give heed to their counsel; suffer not yourself to be led away by any vain or foolish thing; suffer not the devil to lead away your heart again after those wicked harlots. Behold, O my son, how great iniquity ye brought upon the Zoramites: for when they saw your conduct, they would not believe in my words. And now the Spirit of the Lord doth say unto me, Command thy children to do good, lest they lead away the hearts of many

people to destruction; therefore I command you, my son, in the fear of God, that ye refrain from your iniquities; that ye turn to the Lord with all your mind, might, and strength; that ye lead away the hearts of no more to do wickedly; but rather return unto them, acknowledge your faults, and retain that wrong which ye have done; seek not after riches, nor the vain things of this world, for behold, you cannot carry them with you.

Are these principles of moral conduct, and these admonitions only truisms? Doubtless; but how forcibly are they here put! The multiplication table is a series of truisms, but what mighty results in calculations may be brought out by its employment! The daily bread is commonplace, but it nourishes the daily life and preserves it. I have no patience with those who seek to discount the value of moral precepts and the force of godly admonitions by the air-sniffing, sneering expressions—"platitudes," "commonplaces." Let not the youth of Zion who read these words allow such comments to rob the advice of Alma to Corianton of its beauty or its value.

(TO BE CONCLUDED IN SEPTEMBER ERA.)