



BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL  
<http://bookofmormoncentral.com/>



Religious Studies Center  
<https://rsc.byu.edu/>

---

## The Commandment to Be Perfect

Author(s): Gary R. Whiting

Source: *The Book of Mormon: 3 Nephi 9-30, This Is My Gospel*

Editor(s): Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr.

Published: Provo, UT; Religious Studies Center, 1993

Page(s): 101-118

---



The Religious Studies Center is collaborating with Book of Mormon Central to preserve and extend access to scholarly research on the Book of Mormon. Items are archived by the permission of the Religious Studies Center.

<https://rsc.byu.edu/>

# *The Commandment to Be Perfect*

---

7

Gary R. Whiting

When Jesus Christ descended out of the clouds over Bountiful, it must have been a dramatic contrast to the days the Nephites had just experienced. They had seen the awful destruction of their cities, the upheaval and change in the land, and had known the loss of many friends and loved ones. Now, after the days of destruction, darkness, and mourning, the resurrected Jesus Christ appeared from heaven in majesty and brightness. He was the Light, and his brief visit to Bountiful changed forever the lives of the people who met him.

In many ways, the conditions in Bountiful were much different from those in Judea and Galilee. In Judea, everyone was bombarded by the legalism and self-righteous piety of the Pharisees and Scribes. There were also the zealots seeking to overthrow the Roman occupation forces and liberate the Jewish nation. Jesus appeared quietly among the Jews and was almost unnoticed by them. His humble birth, his upbringing, and his hometown all tended to make those who looked at him consider him to be of no importance. In Bountiful, however, everybody knew Jesus was there. First, the voice of the Father, inviting them to hear the words of the Son of God, came from the heavens and pierced each heart (3 Nephi 11:3–7). Then, Jesus descended out of the sky and invited each person, individually, to see and touch the wounds on his body (vv 13–15). These events focused the Nephites' attention directly on Jesus. No one could question who he was, and apparently none did.

---

Gary R. Whiting is an Elder in the Restoration, Reorganized Latter Day Saints, Wichita, Kansas.

Yet, despite the obvious differences in the environments and people to whom Jesus came, there are several remarkable similarities. Both groups of people were children of Israel and shared a common heritage and the covenant promises of the Lord through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Both groups had a multitude of prophetic witnesses about the coming Christ given over hundreds of years. Perhaps the most striking similarity of all, contrary to much of what modern thought proposes, is that they were taught almost the same message from the lips of the Savior. This message is what we commonly call the Sermon on the Mount.

In 3 Nephi, it is written that not even one percent of what happened in the labor of Jesus was recorded (3 Nephi 26:6). Yet the separate testimonies of both nations recorded the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus gave, with some exceptions, the same sermon to both groups of people. Among the Jews, two or three witnesses were needed to establish the truth of anything (Deut 19:15; Heb 10:28). The Sermon on the Mount has two written witnesses. They are found in the record of the Jews (the Bible) and the record of the Nephite/Lamanite nation (The Book of Mormon). Together, they testify that the Sermon on the Mount is true and vital. The Book of Mormon account of this sermon is very useful because it has an extended introduction and explanation given by Christ.

There is more in the Sermon on the Mount than can be addressed here. I have chosen to focus on what I see as the two key phrases in the discourse. First, Jesus begins and ends the Bountiful account by saying that the words are given so that his disciples will know that they must be built upon the rock (3 Nephi 11:39–40; 14:24–27). Second, the Savior commands his disciples to “be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (12:48).

## Built upon the Rock

There was apparently an active dispute among the Nephites when Jesus appeared concerning the manner of baptism. When Jesus called Nephi and the other eleven disciples, his first instruction to them was concerning baptism. He told them how to baptize and said that they were not to dispute over this or any other doctrine.

For verily, verily I say unto you, 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. Behold, 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. (3 Nephi 11:29–30)

Jesus then began to teach them the doctrine that the Father had given him to declare, the only doctrine he wanted them to practice and teach:

And this is my doctrine, and it is the doctrine which the Father hath given unto me; and I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me; and I bear record that the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me.

And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God.

And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and I bear record of it from the Father; and whoso believeth in me, believeth in the Father also; and unto him will the Father bear record of me, for he will visit him with fire and with the Holy Ghost.

And thus will the Father bear record of me, and the Holy Ghost will bear record unto him of the Father and me; for the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one.

And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and become as a little child, and be baptized in my name, or ye can in nowise receive these things.

And again I say unto you, ye must repent, and be baptized in my name, and become as a little child, or ye can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, that this is my doctrine, and whoso buildeth upon this buildeth upon my rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against them.

And whoso shall declare more or less than this, and establish it for my doctrine, the same cometh of evil, and is not built upon my rock; but he buildeth upon a sandy foundation, and the gates of hell stand open to receive such when the floods come and the winds beat upon them. (3 Nephi 11:32–40)

The one thing that shines most brilliantly out of this teaching is its simplicity. The Father's doctrine is simple enough that even an eight-year-old child can understand it. Yet it is broad and deep enough to catch up all of life, and not even a lifetime of study and application can appreciate all that it encompasses.

What did Jesus teach that the Father requires of us? First, we are to believe in Jesus Christ, then repent and become as little children, and then we are to be baptized and we will be saved, otherwise we will be damned. The Father promises to visit those so baptized with the witness and power of the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 11:32–36). We should pay particular attention to the admonition to become as a little child. King Benjamin spoke on the necessity of becoming childlike during his last speech:

For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father. (Mosiah 3:19)

Repentance is the recognition and confession of our sins and our sinful or fallen nature and is predicated upon the belief that Jesus is able to remove both the curses of sin and the desire to sin from us. We sin because by nature we are sinners (Mosiah 3:19) and because we like sinning (JST Gen 4:13; Moses 5:13). By ourselves we are helpless to make the necessary changes. We cannot overcome our own nature. When we come unto Christ, we need cleansing from all our unrighteousness. This includes the changing of our hearts to teach us to pursue the things of the spirit rather than the things of the flesh.

This leads us, then, to believe in Jesus. When we become convinced of the corruptness of our flesh, we realize that we need a deliverer, a Savior. Believing in Christ is trusting that the sacrifice Jesus made, his death on the cross and subsequent resurrection, is sufficient to deliver us from death to eternal life (Rom 6:23). Jesus said to the Pharisees that it was not enough to put new wine in old bottles, but that everything had to be made new (Matt 9:17; verse 23 in JST). To Nicodemus, Jesus said, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). This is accomplished through the new birth of water and the Spirit.

Placing our confidence in the wisdom and power of God, we willingly submit to baptism as a public witness of the change which Jesus Christ has made and is still making in our hearts. From the beginning, God has required humankind to confess their sins and to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (JST Gen 6:51–65; Moses 6:50–62). Restoration scriptures reveal that baptism is a commandment and is to be administered by men given authority to baptize (see D&C 20:37ff). But if we are baptized only because the scripture commands it, without first having repented of our sins, developed faith in Jesus Christ, and brought forth “fruit meet for repentance” (Alma 12:15), baptism is as much a dead work as the sacrifice of the Jews in the days of Isaiah when he wrote:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. (1:11–15)

Baptism must be received by faith, “for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom 14:23).

At the waters of Mormon, the men and women who gathered to hear Alma had already committed themselves to live the Christian life before they were baptized. It was the desire of their hearts to serve Jesus. They entered the waters of Mormon to be baptized as a witness of their allegiance to Christ and as a confession of their faith in him (Mosiah 18:8–16).

Baptism is a public witness of our willingness to obey God in all things. We die to ourselves and are raised to new life in Jesus Christ. By obeying the commandment to be baptized, we remove the penalty of death for our transgressions of the law of God. Our obedience also declares our determination to “live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God” (D&C 84:43–44; see also Deut 8:3).

To those who believe and are baptized according to the commandment, the Father sends the Holy Ghost (3 Nephi 11:35). This is the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost and is the sign given to us from the Father that he has committed all his resources to bringing us into the fulness of his glory. Paul writes that it is the “earnest of our inheritance until the redemption” (Eph 1:13–14). The Holy Spirit is the means by which we receive and understand “every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God” (see D&C 84:43–48; 88:66). Christ taught that God speaks to each of us by the Spirit: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

Jesus taught these things as the doctrine of the Father, and he taught that those who build upon these things build upon the rock. The souls built on the rock are the only ones who will survive the storms of this life and the judgment to come (3 Nephi 14:24–25). The rock here certainly includes the doctrine, but I believe it more fully represents the one of whom the doctrine bears witness, that is, Jesus Christ. He is our rock, our redeemer (Ps 78:35), our refuge and hiding place (32:7). We are saved

not by believing in the doctrine, but by believing in Christ. The doctrine points the sinner to Jesus. And Jesus saves those who believe and obey.

Before we move on, note also that the text does not say *if* storms come, but rather it says *when* they come. Some of these storms are the mists of darkness that Lehi saw in the vision of the tree of life. Nephi was told that the mists of darkness that covered the narrow path were the temptations of the devil (1 Nephi 12:17). Satan is allowed to tempt us so that God may teach us the value of prizing the good and despising the bitter (JST Gen 6:57; Moses 6:55; 2 Nephi 2:15; D&C 29:39). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul exhorted them to take the shield of faith and use it to “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked” (Eph 6:16). Other storms that are a part of this life are allowed to prove who and what we love the most (D&C 98:11–12). If the storms are able to discourage us or move us off the narrow way that leads to the tree of eternal life, then we know that we were not built on the rock. At this point the Holy Ghost teaches us to call on the Lord, confess and repent of our sins, and then Jesus, our advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1; D&C 45:3–4), “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

The sermon spoken by Jesus both to the Nephites at Bountiful and to his disciples on the mount in Judea ends with the same note. Storms are coming, and those who hear and do the things of which Jesus speaks build on the rock. They will be able to withstand, not because of their righteousness, but by virtue of the strength and power resident in the rock, who is Christ Jesus, the Eternal Son of God (see Alma 37:33–37; Hel 5:12).

## Be Perfect, Even as I

Having discussed the foundational principles, we must now learn how to obey the Father’s doctrine. The remainder of Christ’s sermon is a series of examples of how to fulfill the



gospel law. Jesus describes the qualities of the person who lives by the doctrine of God, and the examples he gives all point to the central theme of the whole discourse: “*Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect*” (3 Nephi 12:48; emphasis added).

We are all familiar with this oft-quoted verse, but it seems difficult to understand and apply because it appears to be calling us to a standard that is above our ability to attain. The Lord gave this admonition as a commandment, and true disciples of Jesus Christ want to keep all of God’s commandments and do not want to fail the Master. Striving to attain the high standard of this commandment could lead to discouragement, but there is no need for this. The words of Nephi to his father regarding the Lord’s command to return to Jerusalem for the brass plates offer hope: “I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth” (1 Nephi 3:7).

The way to understand and obey the commandment to be perfect becomes clear when we examine it in the context in which Jesus gave it. The first words Jesus spoke to the multitude after he explained his doctrine to the twelve disciples were the Beatitudes (3 Nephi 12:2–12). Then he spoke of giving all believers to be the salt of the earth and lights to the world (vv 13–16). Following this, Jesus exhorted the people to have confidence in the commandments of the Father, saying that every word of them would be fulfilled down to the smallest part of a letter (vv 17–18). Note that Jesus said that the law was fulfilled, therefore “come unto me and be ye saved” (v 20).

Beginning with 3 Nephi 12:19 is a series of commandments and sayings that Jesus uses to typify the difference between the old covenant of the Mosaic law and the new covenant of the gospel. These verses begin the section of the sermon that culminates in the commandment to be perfect. Jesus employs a definite pattern in these verses. First, he quotes the law (or in some cases, the proverb) and the old understanding of it. Then

he says, in essence, that is how the law has been understood or obeyed, but listen, this is how he wants and has always wanted us to obey it. Through the contrast of the old and the new, Jesus reveals truth.

In all of these contrasts, the interpretation and application that Jesus makes is characterized by one new thing—love. The Jews had developed a system of laws. They were strict and unbending because they were designed to protect the “holiness” of the individual performing the act. However, this kind of holiness often ignored other people and even God. This can be illustrated by briefly looking at the teachings of the Savior in the following cases.

**Thou shalt not kill (Ex 20:13).** This law is as well known to us as today as it was to the Jews and the Nephites. In the Jewish mindset, we would not kill because killing is a sin that would mar our own holiness. As long as we resist the urge to commit the act of murder, we consider ourselves to be righteous. But this kind of “righteousness” allows us to tolerate anger, hatred, and bitterness as long as these feelings don’t lead to violence. Therefore, Jesus said that even if we are angry with a brother we have sinned before God, and if we speak an angry word toward a brother we are in danger of hellfire. Why? Because the righteousness of God is purer than the righteousness of human wisdom. Anger and a hateful tongue bring injury to others and are uncharitable. Charity is kind, is not easily provoked and thinks no evil (see Moroni 7:45). Therefore, Christ taught that we should search our hearts and reconcile ourselves with our brothers before worshipping God so that our worship will be acceptable and we can escape God’s judgment (see 3 Nephi 12:22–24).

**Thou shalt not commit adultery (Ex 20:14).** Jacob condemned the Nephite men who committed the sin of adultery. It is a gross sin against God, but its grossness is also because of the injury it causes others. Jacob said, “Behold, ye have done greater iniquities than the Lamanites, our brethren. Ye have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence

of your children, because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascend up to God against you” (Jacob 2:35).

The sin of adultery must be stringently avoided and the marriage covenant should be kept out of love for one’s partner and children, as well as out of obedience to God. Infidelity undoubtedly injures the parties involved, but deeper damage is done to the spouse and children whose hearts are torn asunder and trampled by this uncharitable act. It is a sin against the hearts of the family, and God hates it. Therefore, Jesus taught that if we lust in our heart we are guilty of the sin (D&C 42:22–23; 63:16). It is better to deny ourselves these things than to be cast into hell. Lust is the seed from which adultery springs.

Jesus said that fornication is the only justifiable reason for divorce in the eyes of God, and even this God hates (3 Nephi 12:32; see also Matt 19:8). Divorce for any other reason puts the marriage partners in the position of committing adultery if they marry again. Is there anything more honored by God than a pure marriage where the husband and wife love and honor one another and the Lord? Is there any other place where the love of God is more represented than in a godly marriage? Paul has written that the marriage of a man and woman is a symbol of Jesus’ relationship to the Church (Eph 5:22–32).

**Thou shalt not forswear thyself (Num 30).** To forswear is to make and break an oath. Thus, this commandment deals with keeping our word, or our oaths. All oaths that we speak are considered to be made and kept to the Lord. While we are to keep our word to God, often our oaths involve things we will do for others. An oath can be seen as a promise, the giving of our word. All of us have broken a promise, or at least have had someone break a promise to us. It is uncharitable to break promises because it injures others. Someone is trusting us to help them or to get something done. If we fail, at the least we have hurt them by violating their trust. How awful it is when our forswearing opens the door for a brother to be tempted by the sin of anger (see Mosiah 4:28).

Jesus counseled the Nephites to limit their spoken words to the minimum and not to make an oath unless they meant to keep it. In another place Jesus said, “I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matt 12:36). Solomon, the son of David and king of Israel wrote:

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon the earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool’s voice is known by multitude of words. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. (Eccl 5:2–4)

Satan tempts us to speak words which he can use to accuse us before the Father. Believers, the sons of God, are described as those who are “led by the Spirit of God” (Rom 8:14). These are they who “live by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God” (D&C 84:44). Therefore, as believers in Jesus Christ, we are to live by the truth which the Spirit gives us so that we may live wisely before God. Our very life is from God and that which he gives us comes from above. Of these things the Lord has said, “Remember that that which cometh from above is sacred, and must be spoken with care, and by constraint of the Spirit; and in this there is no condemnation” (63:64; see also 63:58; Prov 10:19–20). The point that Jesus was making is that we must be careful to speak only that which is truth or by the Spirit. What the Spirit provides is sacred and must be cared for in wisdom and holiness. Therefore, if we speak or make an oath under any influence other than the Spirit of God, it is sin. The wise will not multiply many words, but will open their mouths only as the Spirit gives them utterance (see D&C 88:137). If we speak by any other means, these things will judge us at the last day.

**An eye for an eye (Ex 21:23–24; Lev 24:20).** This is a commandment given in the Mosaic law, and its purpose was to give guidance to authorized judges in the land by which they

could make the punishment fit the crime. This is the principle which the Lord revealed to Alma when transgressors were brought before him for judgment (Mosiah 29:11, 25). If a person was unrepentant and unwilling to make amends with his neighbor, the law dictated the severity of the judgment against him. It was recompense for the loss on the basis of equity according to the damage done. The Jews, however, had come to believe that every man had the right to exact judgment on an offender without a court decision. If someone hit you in the face, you hit him back. If someone cursed you, you cursed back at him. But charity does not think evil and is long suffering (Moroni 7:45). Christ taught that if a man hits you on one side of the face, turn to him the other, and do not revile again (3 Nephi 12:39). Jesus also applied this to our response regarding lawsuits and borrowing (12:40–42). The unspoken side of this law is that if we have charity we will not envy (want to steal or sue) and we will not think evil or rejoice in iniquity (no need to strike anyone or compel them to do anything).

Why does the Lord ask us to suffer these things? Because the disciples of Jesus, by demonstrating charity when evil is shown to them, bring a witness of the glory of God to those bringing the evil. This witness may turn a heart to love God, as it did for Saul (Acts 7:58; 9:4–5), or it may only serve as a witness of judgment against the offender (D&C 98:26–27). It shows that God really is Lord in our life because we submit the whole case to him and trust him to settle it fairly. God promises to execute vengeance against those to whom vengeance is due (Rom 12:19), and we have shown love and have not done injury to one who is loved by God as deeply as we ourselves are loved by him.

**Love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy.** This saying is not a part of our written scripture. It probably developed out of the self-righteousness and self-justification that marks legalism. In contrast, Jesus said that we must love our enemies, bless them who curse us, do good to them who despitefully use us and persecute us (3 Nephi 12:43–44). Why should we behave this

way towards others? Because as disciples of Jesus Christ we will begin to love others as God who first loved us (1 John 4:10–11). While we were yet sinners Christ died for us, yet not only for us, but also for the sins of the whole world (Rom 5:6–10). Does God find pleasure in the death of the wicked? No, but he rejoices with the angels over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:10; see also Ezek 18:23, 32; D&C 18:10–15).

Why did Jesus come into the world? To save sinners from the curse of the law. Are not disciples supposed to follow their Master? Yes! Those who do evil towards us are deceived by the devil into sinning as we were before we turned to Jesus. Such people need Jesus also, and to revile against them or return evil for evil will drive them farther from the truth than they were before. How shall they know the love of God if they do not see it in those who profess to know God? Some, like Saul of Tarsus, will only first see the love of God in the response of Christians to persecution. Therefore, we must pray for and love our enemies. Yes, it will help us, but even more importantly, it may help save a lost soul.

After all of that, Jesus said to the Nephites that all the old things were done away and everything was now new. What did Jesus mean by this phrase? He meant that in him the curse of the law and the animosity it engendered were done away. He revealed that the true purpose of the principles of the law had always been to teach people to love one another. Therefore, he taught, “I would that ye should be perfect, even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect” (3 Nephi 12:48). The law taught people to be perfect in their outward acts and appearances, but Jesus had just said that that was done away. So what did Jesus mean when he said that we are to be perfect? He had been speaking about how to behave in love towards others in many situations. Apparently, the commandment that Jesus gave was not to be perfect in performance and outward acts, but to have perfect love. Perfect love is the same love that Jesus and his Father have. This is charity, and it is defined as “the pure love of Christ, and it endureth for ever; and whoso is found

possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him” (Moroni 7:47).

Jesus continued his sermon after the commandment to be perfect by talking about the qualities of true worship. The worship of God is an act of love towards God. Jesus emphasized that in praying, giving of alms, and fasting, true disciples do not make a big scene about their worship. They know that God sees all and is aware of the intent of their hearts. Worship acts that are dressed up to impress others are offered out of self-love and not as loving acts to God. This is emphasized by Jesus’ statement that a man cannot serve two masters (3 Nephi 13:24). Either we serve God out of love or we are serving the devil, the author of vanity and pride. If we love God, we will serve him and trust in his ability to support us. Therefore, Jesus said, “Seek not the things of this world, but seek ye first the kingdom of God and to establish his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (JST Matt 6:38).

With the fact established that Jesus was commanding us to have charity or perfect love, how can we have this perfect and pure love of Jesus Christ in us? Moroni has recorded the answer written by his father, Mormon. Beginning with Moroni 7:44, Mormon writes that it is by faith in Christ, which arises from a meekness or humility before God and a hope of being raised to eternal life through the atonement of Jesus Christ, that charity is found. The possession of the three characteristics of faith, meekness, and hope, plus the testimony that Jesus is the Christ as declared by the power of the Holy Ghost, equals charity.

In Moroni 7:48, Mormon writes that charity, the pure love of Christ, is bestowed upon all who are true followers of Jesus Christ and is given to us by God the Father. It is also the power which helps us “to become the sons of God” (John 1:12). When Jesus spoke to his disciples in Jerusalem, he said that when he left he would pray and the Father would send the Comforter, or the Holy Ghost, to them (14:16–18). The Holy Ghost is given to us so that we may have the testimony that Jesus is the Christ

and so that through the presence of the Holy Ghost, we may develop charity.

At another time Mormon wrote this to his son concerning the baptism of infants:

And the first fruits of repentance is baptism; and baptism cometh by faith unto the fulfilling the commandments; and the fulfilling the commandments bringeth remission of sins; and the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God. (Moroni 8:25–26)

Thus, charity is a gift given by God to those who are humble and obedient. It is a gift which follows the reception of the Holy Ghost. A believer, by giving diligence to the Holy Ghost and to prayer, maintains this perfect love until the end comes. Charity coexists by the Spirit with the testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

### By Their Fruit Ye Shall Know Them

One of the most enlightening discoveries about the Book of Mormon in recent years has been the discovery of chiasms. Most of us are familiar with this style of Hebrew poetic writing. I have found that the chiasmic pattern is more than simply a marvelous method of writing. We can see chiasm-like patterns in the way God works and reveals himself. For example, God has said that the first shall be last and the last shall be first. Another example is that Jesus came in the meridian of time. All of history before pointed to his coming in the flesh, and all of history after him looks back on his coming in the flesh. For the chiasm “purist” this may seem like stretching the point. However, I’ve found that visualizing the principles of the Sermon on the Mount in this way has opened a door to understanding the sermon more completely.



The doctrine that Jesus presented in the Sermon on the Mount can be loosely organized into a pattern similar to a chiasm. At the beginning and the end of his message, the Master declares that if we hear and obey the Father's doctrine we will be built on the rock. Those built on the rock will escape the fury of life's storms and ultimately the judgment that is coming on the world at the second coming of Jesus Christ (3 Nephi 11:39–41; 14:24–27). The center point of this sermon is the phrase, "be ye perfect," which I have stated is a commandment to have charity or perfect love (12:48). If this is true, then the Nephites, who not only heard but obeyed every word spoken by Jesus, should show fruit that supports this conclusion. Can we find charity in the Nephite people as a result of their obedience to the teachings of Christ?

The history of the Nephites after Christ's visit shows that the Church was established—people repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus and received the Holy Ghost (4 Nephi 1). What fruit did their obedience bring? As we read on we find that there were no disputations or contentions in all the land. Everyone treated each other with justice: "And they had all things common among them; therefore they were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free, and partakers of the heavenly gift" (v 3). There was peace. There were many miracles. In verse 15, we read that all this transpired "because of *the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people*" (emphasis added). The fruit of their obedience was the presence of the Holy Ghost and charity. By this testimony of the Nephites comes evidence that Jesus' intent in the Sermon on the Mount was to call every man, woman, and child to have charity.

When the scribe asked Jesus which of all the commandments was the greatest, Jesus quoted a law from Deuteronomy 6:5 and followed with one from Leviticus 19:18: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. . . . And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt 22:35–39).

Jesus said that all of the law (of Moses) and the prophets hang on these two commandments. Love is the foundation of the two commandments that Jesus said were chief of all. Paul also wrote, “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart” (1 Tim 1:5; see also Rom 10:4; 13:8–10).

In the very beginning, God gave this commandment of love to humanity. Adam received the commandment from the Lord and taught it to his offspring. In Genesis (JST), as given by inspiration, God explained it to Enoch: “In the garden of Eden gave I unto man his agency; and unto thy brethren have I said, and also gave commandment, that they should love one another; and that they should choose me their Father” (JST Gen 7:40; see also Moses 7:33).

From the beginning of this world, God, through Jesus Christ, has sought people who would love him as their Father and who would love one another. To live by charity is to fulfill the measure or reason for our creation. Sin and the judgment of death pronounced on all sinners would have prevented us from learning to love God. To overcome this, Jesus came into the world to atone for sin and give each of us the opportunity to learn to love God as we have been commanded (1 John 5:1–3). This probation, as the Book of Mormon so plainly testifies (see Mormon 9:27–28), grants us the opportunity to learn to love and trust God.

The Sermon on the Mount is not simply a listing of a new set of rules to replace the old rules of the Mosaic law. It is both a call to believe and obey the doctrine of Christ and to develop charity. Believing and obeying is faith in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ’s atonement for sin. Charity develops by the reception of the Holy Ghost and faith (see Moroni 8:25–26).

This sermon by the Master states the commandment, gives the application, and describes the expected fruit of obeying the commandment. It is the appeal of God, the Everlasting Father, to his wayward children to come to the tree of life and partake of the fruit which is most precious (1 Nephi 15:36). This fruit is the love of God (11:25) which is found in Jesus Christ, the

Only Begotten Son of the Father. It is the invitation to plant the word of God in our hearts as a seed and nourish it through the wisdom of the Holy Ghost and to rejoice in its fruit (Alma 32:28). The word is provided to us by God, and if it is received by faith in Jesus Christ it will yield the precious and holy fruit of salvation—charity. Charity grows in our hearts until it is perfected, and once it is perfected, “as he [God] is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17).

The Lord God spoke to Moses and said, “This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). The law of Moses had been misunderstood and viewed as a set of rules which brought drudgery, defeat, and death to the lives of those who tried to keep them (see Rom 7:7–13). Jesus came into the world to bring deliverance to the captives and bring them into the kingdom of the Father. Paul wrote, “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (14:17). Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). When we obey the words of Jesus Christ to be perfect even as he and the Father are, we come under his protecting arm. What a glorious thing it is to be in the light!