

Comments on Alma 42

A discussion on the Fall, free agency, Divine Justice and Mercy and how they both work at Judgement.

1 AND now, my son, I perceive there is somewhat more which doth worry your mind, which ye cannot understand--which is concerning the justice of God in the punishment of the sinner; for ye do try to suppose that it is injustice that the sinner should be consigned to a state of misery.

v1 Alma now turns his attention to the interplay of Justice and Mercy in Judgement. According to Alma's characterization, Corianton's view is it is unjust for a sinner to be assigned to a condition of misery.

Corianton himself probably wouldn't have phrased his position in such manner as it would be rather blasphemous to accuse God of being unjust. Rather, this is probably Alma's view of the logical conclusion and/or implications of Corianton's position.

In Corianton's defense, these chapters never actually present his view from his position. They only present Alma's characterization and dismantling of Corianton's position. We never hear from Corianton himself, so it is a one-sided presentation. This doesn't excuse Corianton's behavior or make Alma's presentation invalid, it just doesn't directly inform us as to what Corianton's position was.

2 Now behold, my son, I will explain this thing unto thee. For behold, after the Lord God sent our first parents forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground, from whence they were taken--yea, he drew out the man, and he placed at the east end of the garden of Eden, cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the tree of life-- 3 Now, we see that the man had become as God, knowing good and evil; and lest he should put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live forever, the Lord God placed cherubim and the flaming sword, that he should not partake of the fruit-- 4 And thus we see, that there was a time granted unto man to repent, yea, a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God. 5 For behold, if Adam had put forth his hand immediately, and partaken of the tree of life, he would have lived forever, according to the word of God, having no space for repentance; yea, and also the word of God would have been void, and the great plan of salvation would have been frustrated. 6 But behold, it was appointed unto man to die--therefore, as they were cut off from the tree of life they should be cut off from the face of the earth--and man became lost forever, yea, they became fallen man. 7 And now, ye see by this that our first parents were cut off both temporally and spiritually from the presence of the Lord; and thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own will.

v2-7 Alma recounts the story of the Fall (v. 2-3) saying it was Adam's separation from the Tree of Life which granted mortals a time to repent and set the stage for the Plan of Salvation (v. 4-5). Thus, both physical (v. 6) and spiritual death (v. 7a-b) came to be, and men were granted the opportunity to choose whatever they would (v. 7c).

v4 Compare 2 Ne. 33:9.

v6 Alma clearly presents the idea that eating the fruit of the Tree of Life is what caused Adam and Eve to live indefinitely in the Garden of Eden. Being denied access to the Tree of Life resulted in them being subjected to death. Alma's presentation is clearly literal, as presented in v. 5, where Adam would be reaching for the fruit of Tree.

v7 "cut off...spiritually from the presence of the Lord", while mankind is cut off from the presence of God as a result of the Fall, he is brought back into God's presence as a result of the resurrection, cf. v. 23.

The corruption of flesh (the Fall) took man out of God's presence and the perfection of it (the resurrection) will bring man back into God's presence. This implies the Fall brought about some organic defect in the flesh of man which rendered it less capable of perceiving spiritual things, and the flaw is corrected in the resurrection. This also suggests that Adam and Eve's flesh bodies prior to the Fall were similar to, if not the same as, a resurrected body.

"thus we see they became subjects to follow after their own wills", being removed from the presence of God left mankind to act for themselves according to whatever they chose. The separation resulted in greater agency.

8 Now behold, it was not expedient that man should be reclaimed from this temporal death, for that would destroy the great plan of happiness. 9 Therefore, as the soul could never die, and the fall had brought upon all mankind a spiritual death as well as a temporal, that is, they were cut off from the presence of the Lord, it was expedient that mankind should be reclaimed from this spiritual death. 10 Therefore, as they had become carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature, this probationary state became a state for them to prepare; it became a preparatory state. 11 And now remember, my son, if it were not for the plan of redemption, (laying it aside) as soon as they were dead their souls were miserable, being cut off from the presence of the Lord. 12 And now, there was no means to reclaim men from this fallen state, which man had brought upon himself because of his own disobedience; 13 Therefore, according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this

probationary state, yea, this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God.

v8-13 Being cut off physically and spiritually from God with the Fall was advantageous (v. 8-9), as mankind was placed in probation in mortality (v. 10). The Plan of Redemption (v. 11) works to redeem fallen man (v. 12) by granting Mercy to those who repent during their probation (v. 13).

v9 This is the first spiritual death wherein all humans are cut off from God's presence. For the "second death" see Hela. 14:18.

v12 While it was Adam and Eve who were the first ones to use their agency to be disobedient, we too use our agency to be disobedient. As such, we sustain, support and endorse Adam and Eve's actions, and, so, we merit the same response. It isn't unfair that we inherited a Fallen state. We would do the same thing they did.

v13 Mercy could not take effect unless man was put into this probationary state out of God's presence. If men sin in God's presence then there is no Mercy as anything against His clear will would be a conscious and entirely willful act of rebellion, as was the case with the War in Heaven, so Justice has full sway and Mercy has little or no purchase. But, with man passing into mortal flesh and out of God's presence, the opportunity for Mercy presents itself as man is left to himself to choose between good and evil, and to repent of evil when they fail to choose good.

Alma makes an important point on how the Fall was essential to enabling Divine Mercy. Without the Fall, there could be no opportunity to sin and then be forgiven afterwards.

14 And thus we see that all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence. 15 And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also.

16 Now, repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment, which also was eternal as the life of the soul should be, affixed opposite to the plan of happiness, which was as eternal also as the life of the soul. 17 Now, how could a man repent except he should sin? How could he sin if there was no law? How could there be a law save there was a punishment?

18 Now, there was a punishment affixed, and a just law given, which brought remorse of conscience unto man. 19 Now, if there was no law given--if a man murdered he should die--

would he be afraid he would die if he should murder? 20 And also, if there was no law given against sin men would not be afraid to sin. 21 And if there was no law given, if men sinned what could justice do, or mercy either, for they would have no claim upon the creature?

22 But there is a law given, and a punishment affixed, and a repentance granted; which repentance, mercy claimeth; otherwise, justice claimeth the creature and executeth the law, and the law inflicteth the punishment; if not so, the works of justice would be destroyed, and God would cease to be God. 23 But God ceaseth not to be God, and mercy claimeth the penitent, and mercy cometh because of the atonement; and the atonement bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead; and the resurrection of the dead bringeth back men into the presence of God; and thus they are restored into his presence, to be judged according to their works, according to the law and justice.

v14-23 present a rather long discussion on how divine Law actuates both Justice and Mercy. Alma's core argument is divine Law requires both Justice and Mercy, not just one or the other (v. 21). Justice and Mercy are not contradictory, but complimentary.

Because of the Fall, all humankind was cut off from God, because Justice requires sinners to be punished (v. 14). But, God made Mercy possible by performing the atonement Himself (v. 15). Repentance requires laws and guilt, otherwise there is no reason to repent (v. 16-21). Laws do exist, and Justice condemns the unrepentant and Mercy spares the repentant when the Resurrection brings us back into God's presence (v. 22-23).

From Alma's comments in v. 1 and v. 25 it is likely Corianton's view is Mercy plays a role such that Justice is displaced in Judgement. Alma develops a *reductio ad absurdum* argument against Corianton's position through a series of rhetorical questions (v. 19-21). He surrounds this with his own view balancing Mercy and Justice against the individual's penitence (v. 14-18, 22-23), thereby providing the solution to the *reductio ad absurdum* argument.

v14-18 After the Fall all mankind was damned by Justice (v. 14), so the Lord Himself performed the Atonement so he could bring about both Justice and Mercy (v. 15). Mercy grants repentance and eternal happiness while Justice grants eternal punishment (v. 16). Repentance necessarily requires there be sin, and sin requires a Law to be broken, and if there is a Law broken then there is a punishment (v. 17). There is a punishment, and a law, and this causes men to suffer for their sins (v. 18).

Alma's intent is to establish that for there to be Mercy there must be some opposite case for Mercy to extract the individual from, namely punishment. If Mercy rescues an individual from punishment, then there must be some punishment inflicted by Justice. Thus, by implication, Mercy requires Justice be present so they are complimentary. If they are complimentary then there must be something differentiating the two, and that is repentance on the part of the sinner.

v15 "God himself", Alma is obviously referring to the Lord of the Hebrew Bible, the ante-mortal Jesus Christ, cf. Isa. 53:10.

v19-21 Alma counters Corianton's idea that there is no punishment in the Resurrection by pointing out the logical consequences of such a position. If there is no Law then men will not fear the punishment of sin, because there won't be any sin (v. 19-20). If there is no Law then there is no Justice or Mercy either (v. 21).

Corianton is apparently arguing in favor of Mercy with no real application of Justice, and Alma points out this isn't possible. Mercy requires there be a Law, and the Law requires Justice and a punishment as well. So, you cannot argue for Mercy alone without Justice as well.

When we typically think of Law, we equate it with punishment as it is held up as a standard we fail to keep (hence Paul's statements that the Law is sin, cf. Rom. 7). However, Alma's presentation presents the Law as necessary for Mercy. If it weren't for the Law, we would not be able to obtain Mercy. Alma's view is a more balanced one and if we internalized it we would have a much different view towards the commandments in general. We would see them as a means of obtaining Mercy rather than as things we cannot live up to and are therefore condemned by.

Paul's focus on the Law was specifically addressing the failing of the Law of Moses to bring about salvation in and of itself, in the absence of the Messiah. Alma is not addressing that subject at all.

v22-23 There is a Law and a punishment associated with the Law (v. 22). But the repentant are claimed by Mercy when the time comes for Judgement according to the Justice of the Law (v. 23).

24 For behold, justice exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved. 25 What, do ye suppose that mercy can

rob justice? I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God. 26 And thus God bringeth about his great and eternal purposes, which were prepared from the foundation of the world. And thus cometh about the salvation and the redemption of men, and also their destruction and misery.

v24-26 are a reverse summary of v. 2-23. Verse 24 summarizes v. 14-23, v. 25 summarizes v. 8-13, and v. 26 summarizes v. 2-7. Alma provides this summary on a rather complex set arguments to distill and emphasize his main points in conclusion.

27 Therefore, O my son, whosoever will come may come and partake of the waters of life freely; and whosoever will not come the same is not compelled to come; but in the last day it shall be restored unto him according to his deeds. 28 If he has desired to do evil, and has not repented in his days, behold, evil shall be done unto him, according to the restoration of God.

29 And now, my son, I desire that ye should let these things trouble you no more, and only let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance.

30 O my son, I desire that ye should deny the justice of God no more. Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point because of your sins, by denying the justice of God; but do you let the justice of God, and his mercy, and his long-suffering have full sway in your heart; and let it bring you down to the dust in humility.

31 And now, O my son, ye are called of God to preach the word unto this people. And now, my son, go thy way, declare the word with truth and soberness, that thou mayest bring souls unto repentance, that the great plan of mercy may have claim upon them. And may God grant unto you even according to my words. Amen.

v27-31 is Alma's closing admonition to Corianton. He states plainly people are free to choose to repent if they want, but if they don't (v. 27) then their evil works will follow them and they will be evil in the resurrection even as they were in life (v. 28).

Alma encourages Corianton to not let himself be bothered by doctrinal matters anymore, but instead focus on his own sins (v. 29). He tells him to stop trying to change his doctrine to make it excuse his sins and instead humble himself (v. 30).

He then reminds him his calling is to preach the word of God to the people, and he admonishes him to do so in solemnity and truth so he may help others (v. 31).

Note the impassioned pleading on the part of Alma. This is not a series of stern threats, this is a father imploring his son to change his ways. He very much wants Corianton to repent and return to the ministry. Given his own personal history, Alma very much Corianton to change and become zealous just like he himself did.

v27 "partake of the waters of life freely", Alma is probably referring to the same tree of life which Adam was initially excluded from when cast out from the Garden, as referenced in v. 2-3. Compare 1 Ne. 11:25 where the tree of life is equated with a river of water.

v30 It is unlikely Corianton was consciously changing his doctrinal views in an attempt to justify his sins. It is more common for people to subconsciously rationalize things, engage in denial, and use sophistry to come up with self-serving doctrines. What Alma is probably doing is exposing Corianton's subconscious motivations to encourage him to be honest with himself and repent.

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