

General Comments on Moroni 7-9

In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established (cf. Deut. 19:15). These three chapters form the final three arguments against the Nephites, each worse than the last, explaining why they were annihilated by the Lord (cf. Mormon 8:7-8). These three chapters are not Moroni remembering his father as he wanders alone. Each chapter is increasingly negative, and traces the downfall of the Nephites.

The first chapter (ch. 7) is an essay on faith, but shows the Nephite church was having difficulty with the basics. The second chapter (ch. 8) shows the Nephite church became mired in contention over matters that revealed they were more interested in faulting the genuinely innocent than in detecting their own flaws and repenting of them. The final chapter (ch. 9) documents Nephite depravity and explains what a society has to do to be wiped off the face of the earth: murder, rape, cannibalism. Despite the horrors they are witnessing firsthand, Mormon counsels Moroni to be diligent so he can save himself (9:6).

Taken in a more generalized way, this is the cycle of apostasy distilled: simple doctrinal and behavioral problems, then contention over egregiously bad doctrine, and then destructive behavior. Things get worse as people rebel and refuse to return and repent.

In all three cases, Moroni uses the writings of his father to condemn the Nephites, as opposed to writing the arguments himself. Mormon witnessed and documented these things as a preeminent leader in the church (note in 8:7-9 Mormon confers with the Lord and the Lord responds, indicating Mormon is the leader of the church) and in the military. Moroni deferred to his father in condemning the Nephites owing to the positions of authority and more extensive experience.

An implicit statement in the narrative is the effect of deliberate rebellion after such exceptional righteousness. The prophecies started all the way back in First Nephi (1 Ne. 12:12, also cp. 2 Ne. 26:9, Alma the Younger repeats it in Alma 45:10-14, Samuel the Lamanite repeats it in Hela. 13:5-10) and was again echoed in Third Nephi (cf. 3 Ne. 27:32) by the Lord Himself. Mormon obliquely alludes to it in 8:29, but never mentions the prophecies outright, apparently hoping at least some of the people would repent and forestall the inevitable.

After the wicked were destroyed in the New World after Jesus' crucifixion, the more righteous remnant were spared and converted and enjoy nearly 200 years of Zion-like existence.

But, when they slide into apostasy afterwards, the fall is so hard it ends up resulting in their extinction.

The Lord created an exceedingly righteous remnant that prospered for a time, but He also foresaw their rebellion and collapse would be as exceedingly bad. This suggests from a sociological point of view that societies have a kind of proportionate rebound effect when it comes to being aggressively managed by the Lord. The Lord chose to purge the wicked to create an exceptionally righteous society, but He knew the effect of doing it would be a society that collapses in extreme rebellion.

Comments on Moroni 7

Moroni quotes one of his father's discourses on "faith, hope, and charity". This discourse by Mormon is rather complex and has more to do with the practical applications of faith, hope, and charity than any doctrinal or theological treatment of those topics.

Mormon's discourse teaches how to discern who and what is good and evil (v. 2-19), how to find and embrace those good things which God has revealed (v. 20-39), and where these good things ought to lead someone (v. 40-48).

Throughout the discourse, Mormon admits he is preaching at the choir (cf. v. 3-5, 39), and yet he continues to exhort them to "lay hold upon every good thing" (cf. v. 19) and towards "the pure love of Christ" (cf. v. 47) informing them it is something they have as yet not achieved (cf. v. 48). This kind of exhortation is probably what Mormon is referring to in 9:4. The people "tremble and anger" when reprimanded outright, so Mormon has to put it to them gently when he encourages them to repent, otherwise his message is lost in hostility and contention. The Nephite church is having difficulty keeping a Christian walk, so Mormon is trying to gently steer them in the right direction.

The text of this chapter is highly structured. Review of [D. Lynn Johnson's arrangement](#) is recommended. I do differ with him over the arrangement of v. 40-48, so I included that section below.

1 AND now I, Moroni, write a few of the words of my father Mormon, which he spake concerning faith, hope, and charity; for after this manner did he speak unto the people, as he taught them in the synagogue which they had built for the place of worship.

v1 Moroni introduces a sermon his father taught believers who congregated at the local synagogue. From reading the books of Mormon and Moroni, the general impression is the only righteous people are Mormon and Moroni, and the Nephites are wholly apostate (cf. 9:3-6). However, this address clearly indicates there was a substantial body of believers, at least large enough to build a synagogue and congregate. So, even while the Nephite culture slid into apostasy, at least a handful, and perhaps quite a few, remained reasonably faithful.

2 And now I, Mormon, speak unto you, my beloved brethren; and it is by the grace of God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and his holy will, because of the gift of his calling unto me, that I am permitted to speak unto you at this time. 3 wherefore, I would speak unto you that are of the church, that are the peaceable followers of Christ, and that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord, from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven.

v2 Mormon addresses the audience by both identifying and deferring to the source of his authority.

4 And now my brethren, I judge these things of you because of your peaceable walk with the children of men. 5 For I remember the word of God which saith by their works ye shall know them; for if their works be good, then they are good also.

6 For behold, God hath said a man being evil cannot do that which is good; for if he offereth a gift, or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent it profiteth him nothing. 7 For behold, it is not counted unto him for righteousness. 8 For behold, if a man being evil giveth a gift, he doeth it grudgingly; wherefore it is counted unto him the same as if he had retained the gift; wherefore he is counted evil before God. 9 And likewise also is it counted evil unto a man, if he shall pray and not with real intent of heart; yea, and it profiteth him nothing, for God receiveth none such. 10 wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift. 11 For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water; wherefore, a man being a servant of the devil cannot follow Christ; and if he follow Christ he cannot be a servant of the devil.

12 wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually. 13 But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.

14 wherefore, take heed, my beloved brethren, that ye do not judge that which is evil to be of God, or that which is good and of God to be of the devil. 15 For behold, my brethren, it is given unto you to judge, that ye may know good from evil; and the way to judge is as plain, that ye may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night. 16 For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God.

17 But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.

18 And now, my brethren, seeing that ye know the light by which ye may judge, which light is the light of Christ, see that ye do not judge wrongfully; for with that same judgment which ye judge ye shall also be judged. 19 wherefore, I beseech of you, brethren, that ye should search diligently in the light of Christ that ye may know good from evil; and if ye will lay hold upon every good thing, and condemn it not, ye certainly will be a child of Christ.

V4-19 Mormon teaches the congregation how to discern between good and evil. He does so by first providing a case and point of his discerning the nature of his audience by their works (v. 3-4). He then indicates it is easy to discern a person's motives by their works (v. 5-11) and it is likewise easy to discern the quality of the works by whether they persuade the person to believe in Christ and serve God (v. 12-18).

The arguments Mormon makes are quite straightforward, so much so that it seems odd he would even have to elaborate on such topics as how good and evil and the devil and God are opposites. However, notice the manner in which Mormon weaves the requirement to believe in Christ into the arguments. We are informed by Moroni in 1:2 that the Lamanites kill any Nephite who will not deny Christ. What is probably happening during Mormon's time is the general apostasy of the Nephites with even the believers being persuaded to reject the doctrine of Christ. This pattern of apostasy has occurred previously among the Nephites (cf. Jacob 7:2, Mosiah 16:13-15, Alma 31:16-17, Hela. 16:18, 3 Ne. 1:5-8, 4 Ne. 1:29), and appears to be occurring once again at the present. Thus the need to emphasize that failing to believe in Christ is devilish and evil (cf. v. 17) and that rejecting Christ is mistaking evil for good (cf. v. 15).

The text of these verses can be arranged as a series of straightforward logical arguments (v. 5-13) and a summary discussion of those logical arguments (v. 14-19). Mormon develops his logical arguments using quotations of the Lord, which he then takes to their logical conclusions.

v6-9 Mormon presents a brief quotation, or more likely a paraphrase, of the Lord, "a man being evil cannot do that which is good", and then offers an explanation of that quote in the second half of v. 6 through v. 9.

Mormon's main thrust in his explanation is the lack of sincerity, and therefore hypocrisy, on the part of the evil man who gives a gift. Unless the person does it with real intent, or genuine sincerity, then it has no benefit to the evil one who gives. Any cynic can find plenty of reasons why someone evil will give gifts and offer prayers (e.g., Matt. 6:1-18), but in doing so there is no benefit to the evil person because the act of charity is lost on that person. It may benefit the recipient, but that is not Mormon's concern at the present is.

Mormon's intent in these verses is to point out that while things may superficially look good, such as giving gifts and praying, if these acts are done without real intent then they are in fact not good. They are acts of hypocrisy which harden the person's heart, and mock God. The evil man is blind to the need of another when he gives only to be seen giving. The hypocrite who prays to be heard praying offends God and thinks only of what will impress the audience and not of what he really needs to address within himself.

v6 The text "for if he offereth...it profiteth him nothing" is probably part of Mormon's explanation rather than a quotation of God as if it were part of the quote it seems likely God would refer to Himself as "me" and not in the third person "God" in the phrase "prayeth unto God".

v11 "servant of the devil cannot follow Christ", note Mormon is contrasting the slave of the devil with the willful follower of Christ, cp. John 8:34.

v15-18 Mormon instructs the audience to judge within themselves concerning what is good and what is evil, cp. 2 Ne. 2:5, Alma 41:14-15. This is different from the prohibition from judging in Matt. 7:1 and 3 Ne. 14:1. In those passages we are told not to judge, meaning condemn (cf. Luke 6:37), people because what we condemn others of we are commonly guilty of ourselves (cf. Matt. 7:2-5).

v19 compliments v. 3 and forms the closing summary to the subject of v. 4-18 providing the thesis.

20 And now, my brethren, how is it possible that ye can lay hold upon every good thing? 21 And now I come to that faith, of which I said I would speak; and I will tell you the way whereby ye may lay hold on every good thing. 22 For behold, God knowing all things, being from everlasting to everlasting, behold, he sent angels to minister unto the children of men, to make manifest concerning the coming of Christ; and in Christ there should come every good thing. 23 And God also declared unto prophets, by his own mouth, that Christ should come. 24 And behold, there were divers ways that he did manifest things unto the children of men, which were good; and all things which are good cometh of Christ; otherwise men were fallen, and there could no good thing come unto them. 25 Wherefore, by the ministering of angels, and by every word which proceeded forth out of the mouth of God, men began to exercise faith in Christ; and thus by faith, they did lay hold upon every good thing; and thus it was until the coming of Christ. 26 And after that he came men also were saved by faith in his name; and by faith, they become the sons of God. And as surely as Christ liveth he spake these words unto our fathers, saying: whatsoever thing ye shall ask the Father in my name, which is good, in faith believing that ye shall receive, behold, it shall be done unto you. 27 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased because Christ hath ascended into heaven, and hath sat down on the right hand of God, to claim of the Father his rights of mercy which he hath upon the children of men? 28 For he hath answered the ends of the law, and he claimeth all those who have faith in him; and they who have faith in him will cleave unto every good thing; wherefore he advocateth the cause of the children of men; and he dwelleth eternally in the heavens. 29 And because he hath done this, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased? Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither have angels ceased to minister unto the children of men. 30 For behold, they are subject unto him, to minister according to the word of his command, showing themselves unto them of strong faith and a firm mind in every form of godliness. 31 And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father, which he hath made unto the children of men, to prepare the way among the children of men, by declaring the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him. 32 And by so doing, the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ, that the Holy Ghost may have place in their hearts, according to the power thereof; and after this manner bringeth to pass the Father, the covenants which he hath made unto the children of men.

v20-39 Mormon's overall intent is to explain how people can have access to what is good, or in other words, what God has revealed to man. In doing so, he touches on how God communicates

with man through the pre-Christian era (v. 22-25), the Christian era (v. 26-32), and the contemporary time (v. 33-39).

Mormon explains that before Christ came angels were sent to mankind and God Himself spoke to man (v. 22-25). Then Christ came and spoke to mankind himself (v. 26) and then even though he ascended into heaven (v. 27-28) this did not end the ministry of angels to men (v. 29-30). Rather, the ministering angels continue to appear to righteous men so these righteous men can in turn persuade all of the other men to believe in Christ (v. 31-32). And, even now, at the time present to Mormon, Jesus has told them to have faith and repent (v. 33-34), so if this is the case then angels are still ministering to mankind and nothing has changed from the beginning and neither will it change (v. 35-36). However, if angels do cease to speak to men, then it is because the men have no faith, and then they are in a terrible state because it will be for them as though there was no spiritual redemption at all (v. 37-38). But, fortunately for them, Mormon discerns that the contemporary church isn't at that state (v. 39).

v25 summarizes v. 22-24, the pre-Christian era.

v28 is a parenthetical comment by Mormon explaining what he meant by "rights of mercy" in v. 27.

v29 "and because he hath done this", the "this" is referring to the substance of v. 27, picking up after the parenthetical comment in v. 28.

v31 "and to fulfil and to do the work of the covenants of the Father", one of the responsibilities of ministering angels is to account for and ratify Priesthood ordinances under the authority of the Holy Spirit of Promise, cp. D&C 132:7.

"by declaring the word unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him", cp. Mosiah 8:18, D&C 93:46.

33 And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me. 34 And he hath said: Repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved. 35 And now, my beloved brethren, if this be the case that these things are true which I have spoken unto you, and God will show unto you, with power and great glory at the last day, that they are true, and if they are true has the day of miracles ceased? 36 Or have angels ceased to appear unto the children of men? Or has he withheld the power of the Holy Ghost from them?

Or will he, so long as time shall last, or the earth shall stand, or there shall be one man upon the face thereof to be saved? 37 Behold I say unto you, Nay; for it is by faith that miracles are wrought; and it is by faith that angels appear and minister unto men; wherefore, if these things have ceased wo be unto the children of men, for it is because of unbelief, and all is vain. 38 For no man can be saved, according to the words of Christ, save they shall have faith in his name; wherefore, if these things have ceased, then has faith ceased also; and awful is the state of man, for they are as though there had been no redemption made. 39 But behold, my beloved brethren, I judge better things of you, for I judge that ye have faith in Christ because of your meekness; for if ye have not faith in him then ye are not fit to be numbered among the people of his church.

v36-37 are similar in thesis to Mormon 9:7-27.

40 And again, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope? 41 And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise. 42 wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope. 43 And again, behold I say unto you that he cannot have faith and hope, save he shall be meek, and lowly of heart. 44 If so, his faith and hope is vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart; and if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity; for if he have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity. 45 And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. 46 wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail-- 47 But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him. 48 wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God; that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen.

v40-48 Mormon concludes his sermon by telling the audience where their faith and hope in Christ should be taking them. He starts with a rhetorical question (v. 40-41a) and then answers

the question himself (v. 41b-48). These verses can be arranged as an inverted parallelism which peaks on Mormon's description in v. 45 of what charity is.

40 And again, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope? 41 And what is it that ye shall hope for?

A - Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise.

B - 42 Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope. 43 And again, behold I say unto you that he cannot have faith and hope, save he shall be meek, and lowly of heart. 44 If so, his faith and hope is vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart;

C - and if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confesses by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must needs have charity;

D - for if he have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity.

E - 45 And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

D - 46 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth.

C - Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail-- 47 But charity is the pure love of Christ, and it

endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

B - 48 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ; that ye may become the sons of God;

A - that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is; that we may have this hope; that we may be purified even as he is pure. Amen.

Their faith and hope in Christ should be transforming them to be like Christ (the A's), filled with meekness and humility and self-sacrificing love (the subject of the C's and of E), so that when they are resurrected and lifted up they will be like him spiritually (the A's). If the person's faith and hope do not motivate them to be meek and humble and ultimately charitable as well (the B's and C's), then it will amount to nothing (the D's).

v45 provides a clear behavioral definition of what "charity" is, and therefore what someone who has charity should behave like. As it is a goal Mormon is encouraging the Christians to strive for, he is defining the otherwise ambiguous goal into clear behaviors.

This verse is largely a quotation of 1 Cor. 13:3-7 where Paul is, just like Mormon, admonishing the church to be filled with Christ-like love, and providing a behavioral definition. That Smith would defer to the KJV in a similarly worded passage follows with his prior pattern through all of the Isaiah quotes in 1 Ne. and 2 Ne. As both Paul and Mormon and providing behavioral definitions of "charity", why would we expect them to be substantially different?

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