

Comments on Moroni 8

This chapter is a blistering attack on people among the Nephites who believe infants need to be baptized. Mormon rejects this as "dead works" (v. 23) and says it is the people who believe this who need to repent and be as little children (v. 10) or they will be sent to hell (v. 21).

The argument in the chapter is that of adults saying infants are sinful, so the adults are taking the focus off themselves and putting it onto infants. Mormon takes it off infants and puts it back onto the adults who are promoting the false doctrine.

The origin of the doctrine would be infant mortality, and the fear of religious parents over the eternal state of those children. But, adults who respond with the solution of infant baptism are focusing on the wrong thing, making an innocent baby at fault when it is they themselves who are at fault. While the intrinsically sinful nature is inherited by all mortals when we are born into a fallen world, we are only judged for our own sins. Infants sinless, and have no need for baptism.

The unstated implications in Mormon's argument are there was no infant baptism under the Law of Moses (v. 8), and Jesus didn't institute it Himself (v. 11-13), so the only reason the Nephites would now start such a practice is to fault the innocent and self-righteously excuse themselves (v. 5). Such doctrine shows these people have strayed far away from what Jesus Himself taught (v. 8).

Some readers take this chapter as an overt indictment of the practice of the Roman Catholic Church of baptizing infants. While it can be read as such by implication, it is clear Mormon is commenting on a Nephite practice, not a last-days Gentile practice. Various Book of Mormon authors directly address the apostasy of the Church in general among Gentiles. This is not what Mormon is doing in the present text. Taking it as a broadside against the Roman Catholic Church is acontextual.

1 AN epistle of my father Mormon, written to me, Moroni; and it was written unto me soon after my calling to the ministry. And on this wise did he write unto me, saying: 2 My beloved son, Moroni, I rejoice exceedingly that your Lord Jesus Christ hath been mindful of you, and hath called you to his ministry, and to his holy work. 3 I am mindful of you always in my prayers, continually praying unto God the Father in the name of his Holy Child, Jesus, that he, through his infinite goodness and grace, will keep you through the endurance of faith on his name to the end.

v1-3 Mormon is pleased with Moroni's call to the ministry (v. 2) and prays for his success in that calling (v. 3).

4 And now, my son, I speak unto you concerning that which grieveth me exceedingly; for it grieveth me that there should disputations rise among you. 5 For, if I have learned the truth, there have been disputations among you concerning the baptism of your little children. 6 And now, my son, I desire that ye should labor diligently, that this gross error should be removed from among you; for, for this intent I have written this epistle.

7 For immediately after I had learned these things of you I inquired of the Lord concerning the matter. And the word of the Lord came to me by the power of the Holy Ghost, saying: 8 Listen to the words of Christ, your Redeemer, your Lord and your God. Behold, I came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance; the whole need no physician, but they that are sick; wherefore, little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin; wherefore the curse of Adam is taken from them in me, that it hath no power over them; and the law of circumcision is done away in me. 9 And after this manner did the Holy Ghost manifest the word of God unto me; wherefore, my beloved son, I know that it is solemn mockery before God, that ye should baptize little children.

v4-9 Mormon is upset about contention within the church (v. 4) over the baptism of infants (v. 5). Mormon wants Moroni to do everything in his power to eliminate the practice (v. 6). Immediately after learning of the matter from Moroni, Mormon prays about it and the Holy Spirit tells him (v. 7) the Lord rejects this practice because little children cannot sin, and repentance is for sinners (v. 8). Mormon then reinforces the position by saying the practice is rejected (v. 9).

v7-9 Mormon is the de facto leader of the Nephite Church, if he isn't the formal leader. The fact the Lord communicates with him upon matters of doctrine reveals his leadership position, whether the Nephite Church acknowledges it or not.

The text is mute on what Mormon's role inside the Nephite Church is. We know he was the military leader (cf. Mormon 2:1-2, Mormon 5:1) and was clearly a spiritual leader (cf. Mormon 3:3-4), but, owing to the obvious corruption and ongoing dissolution of the Nephite Church, his formal role is unclear. If he were the formal leader, it seems unlikely he would admonish Moroni to eliminate the doctrine from among his people. It is more likely he would address it directly himself.

v8 This verse is presented as a direct quotation of the Lord.

"law of circumcision is done away in me", under the Law of Moses, circumcision was to be performed on male infants at the age of eight days old (cf. Gen. 17:13). Here, Jesus identifies a former ordinance that was historically performed and then ended with the Law of Moses (cf. 3 Ne. 15:2-8). The implication

is infant baptism did not replace circumcision or appear at that time. Circumcision was eliminated and not replaced by anything. As Christ Himself appeared to the Nephites and ended the practice of circumcision when He appeared to the Nephites, if He wanted them to start baptizing infants He would have told them to do that. Instead, He instituted baptism for adults (cf. 3 Ne. 19:10-13). The little children whom he ministered to were encircled with light without being baptized (cf. 3 Ne. 17:11-25), where the adults were encircled with light only after being baptized.

10 Behold I say unto you that this thing shall ye teach--repentance and baptism unto those who are accountable and capable of committing sin; yea, teach parents that they must repent and be baptized, and humble themselves as their little children, and they shall all be saved with their little children. 11 And their little children need no repentance, neither baptism. Behold, baptism is unto repentance to the fulfilling the commandments unto the remission of sins. 12 But little children are alive in Christ, even from the foundation of the world; if not so, God is a partial God, and also a changeable God, and a respecter to persons; for how many little children have died without baptism! 13 Wherefore, if little children could not be saved without baptism, these must have gone to an endless hell.

v10-13 Mormon tells Moroni to teach the people that parents need to repent, not their children, so they will be saved with their children (v. 10). Little children do not need to repent or be baptized. Baptism is part of the repentance process, for the forgiveness of sins (v. 11). Little children are exempt from the punishment for sin, being covered by Christ. It has always been like this, since the beginning of the world. God has not recently changed position on the matter, now requiring infant baptism (v. 12), as that would mean all previous infants were damned (v. 13).

The wording of v. 12-13 is obscure. Mormon's is saying a change in this doctrine now, as being forwarded by some in the Nephite church, would mean all previous infants who died without baptism are damned, all the way back to the beginning of time. The implication is that since neither the Law of Moses nor the Christian church has taught this doctrine, that a change like this necessarily requires God to be capricious and disregard all previous infants who died without baptism.

An unstated tangent to the argument has to do with vicarious ordinance work. If the Nephite church believed in and practiced baptism for the dead, then why would they forward such a doctrine as the necessity of the baptizing little children? If they believed infants needed to be baptized, and they believed in vicarious ordinance work, then they would practice

that for infants who died prior to the age of accountability. Instead, they argue infants are damned. But, perhaps the doctrine of vicarious baptism was not introduced among the Nephites in Third Nephi when Christ visited, as it is not explicitly present in the text.

14 Behold I say unto you, that he that supposeth that little children need baptism is in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity; for he hath neither faith, hope, nor charity; wherefore, should he be cut off while in the thought, he must go down to hell. 15 For awful is the wickedness to suppose that God saveth one child because of baptism, and the other must perish because he hath no baptism. 16 Wo be unto them that shall pervert the ways of the Lord after this manner, for they shall perish except they repent.

Behold, I speak with boldness, having authority from God; and I fear not what man can do; for perfect love casteth out all fear. 17 And I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love; wherefore, all children are alike unto me; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love; and they are all alike and partakers of salvation.

18 For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity. 19 Little children cannot repent; wherefore, it is awful wickedness to deny the pure mercies of God unto them, for they are all alive in him because of his mercy. 20 And he that saith that little children need baptism denieth the mercies of Christ, and setteth at naught the atonement of him and the power of his redemption. 21 Wo unto such, for they are in danger of death, hell, and an endless torment. I speak it boldly; God hath commanded me. Listen unto them and give heed, or they stand against you at the judgment-seat of Christ.

v14-21 Those who believe the doctrine of infant baptism do not have the love of Christ in themselves (v. 14), and will be damned themselves if they do not repent (v. 15). Unlike those who teach this doctrine, Mormon feels and understands Christ's love (v. 16) and knows little children have access to the Lord's salvation (v. 17) without baptism. God has not changed His doctrine on this matter (v. 18), because little children are not subjected to the punishment of sin, so they cannot repent. Saying they need to repent is to reject God's divine mercy (v. 19) and the atonement of Christ (v. 20). The people who teach infant baptism are in danger of the hell they say the unbaptized infants are destined for, and if they do not repent and listen to Mormon's warning, they will be damned for it (v. 21).

22 For behold that all little children are alive in Christ, and also all they that are without the law. For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law; wherefore, he that is not condemned, or he that is under no condemnation, cannot repent; and unto such baptism availeth nothing-- 23 But it is mockery before God, denying the mercies of Christ, and the power of his Holy Spirit, and putting trust in dead works. 24 Behold, my son, this thing ought not to be; for repentance is unto them that are under condemnation and under the curse of a broken law. 25 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; 26 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.

v22-26 Mormon contrasts little children (v. 22-23) with adults (v. 24-26). Little children are not under the condemnation of the law (v. 22), and the idea of baptizing them is contrary to everything sacred (v. 23). Humble adults who follow the path of repentance to baptism end up back with God in heaven (v. 24-26).

Clearly the children who die before they are accountable will return to live with God, being exempt from condemnation. It is adults who have to deal with their sins. The adults can either pridefully trust in the arm of flesh and believe in their own works (v. 23), which result in spiritual death. Or, the adults can humble themselves, repent, be baptized, be filled with the Spirit and inherit eternal life (v. 24-26).

Mormon is implying people who forward the doctrine of infant baptism (v. 23) are prideful and will not follow the path of repentance outlined in v. 24-26.

v23 This verses uses a series of negatives to frame the doctrine of infant baptism as a rejection of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit in favor of the works of the flesh, which lead to spiritual death. Mormon's intent is to reverse the idea that infant baptism spares the infant from spiritual death, and instead condemns adults who forward the doctrine to that same spiritual death.

"dead works", Mormon is not saying baptism in and of itself is a dead work. He is saying the works of men who reject Christ's teachings and set up their own doctrines, such as baptizing infants, are embracing works that do not save people.

v24-26 In contrast to the dead end of dead works in v. 23, these verses present an ascension theme using repetition to show the path for a repentant adult to get back to God:

repentance is unto them that are under condemnation...first fruits of repentance is

baptism; and

baptism cometh by faith unto the

fulfilling the commandments; and

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 visitation of the

Holy Ghost, which
Comforter filleth with hope and perfect
love, which
love endureth by diligence unto prayer

Mormon places repentance before baptism and makes it part of the process of keeping the commandments. Infants cannot repent or keep the commandments, so there is no point in baptism for them. Once they are accountable as adults, then they enter in the path of repentance, baptism and so on.

27 Behold, my son, I will write unto you again if I go not out soon against the Lamanites. Behold, the pride of this nation, or the people of the Nephites, hath proven their destruction except they should repent. 28 Pray for them, my son, that repentance may come unto them. But behold, I fear lest the Spirit hath ceased striving with them; and in this part of the land they are also seeking to put down all power and authority which cometh from God; and they are denying the Holy Ghost. 29 And after rejecting so great a knowledge, my son, they must perish soon, unto the fulfilling of the prophecies which were spoken by the prophets, as well as the words of our Savior himself. 30 Farewell, my son, until I shall write unto you, or shall meet you again. Amen.

v27-30 Mormon concludes the letter by saying he hopes to write again soon, but he fears that war will interfere (v. 27). Mormon encourages Moroni to pray for the Nephites so they will repent, but he fears they are beyond hope, as they have rejected religion and God and the Spirit (v. 28). Their deliberate rebellion is so great, they must soon be destroyed, as predicted by the prophets (v. 29). Mormon hopes Moroni will do well until Mormon can write to him or see him again (v. 30).

v29 The prophecies of destruction Mormon is referring to is that of 1 Ne. 12:12, 2 Ne. 26:9, Alma 45:10-14, Hela. 13:5-10 and 3 Ne. 27:32.

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