

A Meaning of “Charity”, LeGrand Baker

Like Peter (1 Peter 1:2-4, 2 Peter 1:1-10), Mormon places charity as the indispensable peak of the mountain one must climb to find eternal life.

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.

Mormon’s final words are like “act 3” of the 23rd Psalm: “and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” They are also the conclusion of the 9th verse of the Beatitudes: “And blessed are all the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” Mormon’s final words are:

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 (Moroni 7:19-48).

The beginning and ending of Moroni 7 are the same beginning and ending as verse 9 of the Beatitudes: “And in the state of the gods are all the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” The only difference is that here Mormon is speaking to his “beloved brethren,” while Jesus was speaking to a congregation of men, women and children. That difference is reflected in Mormon’s words, “that ye may become the sons of God,” while the Savior’s words are not gender-specific: “for you shall be called the children of God.”

His word, “called,” denotes that they are given a new name, and the name is the same one that is recorded as the royal king-name in Psalm 2 where God is represented as saying:

6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.
[And the king testifies,]
7 I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me,
Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.

(Psalm 2:6-7)¹

We look around the world and see other people whom our eyes and ears testify to our brain are real. Experience has taught us to accept the testimony of our eyes and ears, and we believe the people are real. We can interact with them, as well as see hear, and touch them. All of those sensations are in the “heart”—the cosmic center of the person where the ancients assigned both one’s emotions and one’s intellect. But the heart/brain is not designed to be able to give its owner absolute proof of anything. (Food that tastes good may not be good for the body; people who look beautiful may not be kind.) All that we see hear and feel are only our brain’s interpretation of electronic impulses. We get much the same kind of electronic information when we sit in a movie theater as when we watch a live theatrical production.

Although we believe the latter is the more real, we have no better evidence than what our body and our experiences have taught us to accept. In fact, we have no compelling evidence at all. If one projects that argument to its logical conclusion, we have no absolute evidence that any of our family or friends even exist. That’s an age old philosophical question. We might go back to the primary question and suggest that we have no absolute evidence that we are real.

We write that, and we suppose it sounds rational, but it is really quite silly. To begin with, we know that we are—not for the classic reason: “I think therefore I am,” but because we love. We know love is real because we know—*really know*—that Jesus is God: we have experienced his love for us and ours for him. That love *IS* reality—it is the ultimate experience that finds confirmation in the combined testimony of both our bodies and our souls. Our having experienced that love is the only absolute proof we have that we are. We know that we are, because we know that He exists. We see family and friends, and we love them. We know that kind of love is also real because it is like the love we have for our Savior. They receive and reciprocate, therefore we know that they are real also. Through those experiences, we are also assured that the people whom we love, but who do not reciprocate, are also real. In that knowledge—the sure knowledge that we have the capacity to both love and be loved—is absolute proof that God is, that we are, and that other people are. (Truth, light, and love are only slightly different expressions of the same thing, and their product is joy.)

Friendships, like families, are eternal. One of the reasons it is so important that we be sealed to our families is because our friends are also sealed to theirs. Somewhere, way back in the generations, we will come to the place where our families are the same. We will find that we are sealed to our friends with the same authority that we are sealed to our immediate families. Friendships are eternal because families are eternal. This concept is a perfect thread that runs through the stories of friendships in the Book of Mormon. Its most powerful expression is at the conclusion of Helaman’s epistle to Moroni:

And now, my beloved brother, Moroni, may the Lord our God, who has redeemed us and made us free, keep you continually in his presence; yea, and may he favor this people, even that ye may have success in obtaining the possession of all that which the Lamanites have taken from us, which was for our support. And now, behold, I close mine epistle. I am Helaman, the son of Alma (Alma 58:41).

That expression of brotherly love is bound up in their mutual love of the Savior. It must be that way, or it cannot be eternal.

¹For a discussion of “son” as the royal king-name, see the chapter called, “Act 2, Scene 9: The Coronation Ceremony in Isaiah 61.”

Truth, in D&C 93 is knowing reality as God knows it, in sacred time, past, present, and future. He knows all truth, which at least in our context means his knowledge includes all things in linear time and in the space associated with it.

His light is in and through all things (D&C 88 & 93²). All things are made by, through, and of him. In theoretical physics, it comes down to the string theory that holds that all things are little wiggles of energy. Energy is light—ie, all things are made “of him”—of his light—not of his person but of the light that surrounds and defines him.

His love is also in all things, and sustains all things.

So, light, truth, and love are equivalents. The words are simply different ways we have of describing the same thing. When we know someone in sacred time and perceive the light that is in them, then we love them. The product of light, truth, love is joy—which is the essence of a

2The evidence that truth, light and life are the same things are in D&C 88 and 93. The fact that God’s love, as well as his light, is in and through all things is self evident and needs no proof.

4 This Comforter is the promise which I give unto you of eternal life, even the glory of the celestial kingdom;

5 Which glory is that of the church of the Firstborn, even of God, the holiest of all, through Jesus Christ his Son—

6 He that ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth;

7 Which truth shineth. This is the light of Christ. ...

11 And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings;

12 Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—

13 The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God. ... (D&C 88:4-7,11-13)

8 Therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word, even the messenger of salvation—

9 The light and the Redeemer of the world; the Spirit of truth, who came into the world, because the world was made by him, and in him was the life of men and the light of men.

10 The worlds were made by him; men were made by him; all things were made by him, and through him, and of him. ...

24 And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come;

25 And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning.

26 The Spirit of truth is of God. I am the Spirit of truth, and John bore record of me, saying: He received a fulness of truth, yea, even of all truth;

27 And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments.

28 He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things. (D&C 93:8-10, 24-28)

full life. There can be no fullness of joy if we are alone. In the Celestial Kingdom people are sealed together in an eternal bond, and therefore, in the Celestial Kingdom their joy is complete.

In the knowledge of the reality of eternal love, is embedded the foundation of the laws of our own beings. Within the context of that knowledge—our knowledge of our relationship with the Savior and with his children—we may begin—in this life—to re-discover the nature, quality, and origin of our eternal personalities. As we come to know ourselves, we also discover the window through which we can learn what truth is. The window is formed within the perimeters of our own reality—the law of one’s own being. The meaning and expansiveness of that law can best be understood by the Prophet’s assurance:

1 When the Savior shall appear we shall see him as he is. We shall see that he is a man like ourselves.

2 And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy (D&C 130:1-2).

It is there, in the bonds of eternal togetherness—family and friends—where one discovers the fruition of one’s own Self. It is within that togetherness that we keep, and therefore seal the covenants we made at the Council in Heaven. It is not Nirvana. We do not lose our personalities, but rather we perfect them through the love we have for others. The implication is this: perfection is simply the maturation of what one is—the self-defined—and God approved—eternal law of one’s own being.

Sin, then, is a violation of the law of one’s own being because it is a degradation of one’s Self just as it is the intrusion upon the integrity of others. Generic sins (like anger, stealing, inappropriate sex—the ones that are spelled out in the commandments) are actions and attitudes that do violence to everyone’s Self as well as to others. If that is true, then sin is being something other than what one is; really serious sin is the maturation of what one is not. (As we write that it occurs to us that it would be easy for someone to take that statement out of context and make it a self-justification for almost anything one wishes. But that won’t work—it is the “God approved” part that restricts one’s definition of one’s eternal Self to the principles of righteousness.) So sin is simply one’s functioning, or seeking to function, outside the righteous law of one’s own being.

If that is correct, then for God to teach one “his way” and for one to walk in that way, probably means that one seeks to retain or reclaim the identity and personality he had at the Council—to retain in this world’s environment, the integrity he maintained in the world before this one. That can be done, as Abinadi insisted, by seeking to understand the intimate sonship relationship between the Savior and his children. Charity is knowing and loving in sacred time.

Nibley completes the story:

These five things you have asked me about (the Lord tells the apostles after his resurrection, in the Kephalaia) appear very small and unimportant to the world, but they are really a very great and holy thing. I will teach you the mysteries now. These tokens (*semeia*) go back to the ordinances of the first man, Adam himself. He brought them with him when he came out of the garden of Eden, and having completed his struggle upon the earth, he mounted up by these very same signs and was received again into the Aeons of Light. The person who receives these becomes a Son. He both gives and receives the signs and the tokens of the God of truth, while demonstrating the same to the Church--all in hopes that some day

these things may become a reality. So the apostles realized that these things are but forms and types, yet you can't do without them. You cannot do without analogues. For us they may only be symbols, but they must be done here, the Lord says. They may be but symbols here, but they are indispensable steps to the attainment of real power. 'In fact', say the Pistis Sophia, 'without the mysteries one loses one's power. Without the ordinances, one has no way of controlling matter, for such control begins with the control of one's self. The ordinances provide the very means and the discipline by which light operates on material things. 'You don't understand this now,' it continues, 'but your level, or taxis, in the next world will depend on the ordinances you receive in this world. Whoever receives the highest here will understand the whys and the wherefores of the great plan.' 'You can't understand it now, but you will. Your faith is being tested here. It is through the ordinances that one makes this progress in knowledge, so that those who receive all available ordinances and teachings here shall pass by all the intermediate topoi and shall not have to give the answers and signs, nor stand certain tests hereafter.'" (Nibley, *Temple and Cosmos*, 310-11.)

This world really is a lonely, dreary place. The only power that penetrates its shroud of darkness are the light of the Saviour, and the smiling light of the people we love. Significantly, that light is the only thing we can take with us to enjoy after we leave this world.

The idea that the quality of one's love is the defining characteristic of one's eternal Self is sustained, not only by the scriptures that teach us about charity, but also by statements like these:

1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith [*pistis*] with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: [Here Peter combines *pistis* and righteousness to represent all of the blessings of the ancient temple, just as Mormon does in Moroni 7.]

2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Peter 1:1-3).

61 If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and *peaceable things*--- that which *bringeth joy*, that which *bringeth life eternal* (D&C 42:61).

The source of that joy is identified in Section 88:

40 For intelligence cleaveth unto intelligence; wisdom receiveth wisdom; truth embraceth truth; virtue loveth virtue; light cleaveth unto light; mercy hath compassion on mercy... (D&C 88:40).

It is further clarified in Section 130.

1 When the Savior shall appear we shall see him as he is. We shall see that he is a man like ourselves.

2 And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it

will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy (D&C 130:1-2).

That same section of the Doctrine and Covenants contains two verses that wrap up the whole panorama of our existence into a single idea:

18 Whatever *principle of intelligence* [that does not say “academic information”] we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.

19 And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come (D&C 130:19).

Beginning with the premise that the words given by the Lord to the Prophet Joseph are carefully chosen and precise in meaning, we can conclude that in that scripture “knowledge” cannot mean an accumulation of ephemeral and transitory information. If the knowledge has eternal value, it must be knowledge of eternal truth.

24 And truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; (D&C 93:24).

It is equally evident what is meant by the phrase “whatever principle of intelligence.” “Principle” is singular, so the word “whatever” refers to possible variants in quality, not in quantity. (If the Lord had said “principles of intelligence,” then he would have been talking about quantity.) That being so, we may know he is talking about only that one supreme principle that James calls “the royal law,” “the perfect law of liberty” (James 2:8, 1: 25).

That eternal law is the ever-expansive “principle of intelligence.” As we have already discussed, intelligence is defined in Section 93 as “the light of truth.” In 88, we learn that “truth shines.” Truth is knowledge in sacred time, is equivalent to light, is equivalent to love, is equivalent to joy. Thus, the scripture says—and all of the scriptures affirm—the “principle of intelligence” that we must “attain unto in this life” and that will “rise with us in the resurrection” is truth-light-love-joy. The quality of our love for the Saviour and for our Father’s children is also the quality of joy that will define and sustain us throughout all the eternities to come.