

Embrace in the Book of Mormon, LeGrand Baker

The embrace which comes as a kind of post script to First Nephi is not only symbolic of surety in this life, but also of eternal life:

But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love. (II Nephi 1:15) (Same promise was given to Oliver Cowdery, D&C 6:20)

That embrace is the golden thread which is woven throughout the BofM. It is the prayer of Nephi's psalm, "O Lord, wilt thou encircle me around in the robe of thy righteousness!" (2 Ne. 4:33); and the burden of Mormon's lament, "[Had the Lamanites repented,] they might have been clasped in the arms of Jesus." (Mormon 5:11)

Alma says this embrace is, as is all else, a gift of the atonement. "And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and encircles them in the arms of safety, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice" (Alma 34:16) -- and there is the rub, for, for this holy embrace, as in all things, there is a counterfeit.

The counterfeit has a variety of names, it is called being encircled about "by the everlasting chains of death" (Alma 36:18); "by the bands of death, and the chains of hell" (Alma 5:7, 14:6); and "with everlasting darkness and destruction" (Alma 26:15). Alma describes it as "a snare of the adversary, which he has laid to catch this people, that he might bring you into subjection unto him, that he might encircle you about with his chains, that he might chain you down to everlasting destruction..." (Alma 12:6).

In contrast, the symbolism of the sacred embrace is eternal happiness. It appears in two forms in the BofM, (1) as symbolic of the mutual esteem between those who share their love for the Saviour; (2) as symbolic of our final relationship with our Father in Heaven.

Two examples of the former:

A. During a vision of in which an angel conducts Nephi into the future, the see the mortal life of the Saviour. Nephi records,

And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things. And he spake unto me, saying: Yea, and the most joyous to the soul. (I Nephi 11:21-23)

The informality of that conversation, punctuated by the heart-felt, almost incidental, comment of the angel suggests to me that the same kind of relaxed friendship existed

between this angel and Nephi as existed between Moroni and the Prophet Joseph Smith.

B. Helaman's words to Moroni at the end of the letter about the 2000 young men with whom Helaman shares those same kinds of feelings.

And now, my beloved brother, Moroni, may the Lord our God, who 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)

All that I already knew and we may have talked about it. However the new idea that came to me was that in Moroni 10:32-3 the sacred embrace is symbolic of eternal life.

But before I go into that, here is the OED definition of deny: To refuse to admit the existence of; to refuse to recognize or acknowledge; to withhold, to refuse to give or grant; to reject; to refuse to do; to forbid; to refuse to take or accept; refuse admittance to. All those ideas can, I think, be summed up in the words t "to stand aloof," which means, "at a distance, especially in feeling or interest; reserved or reticent; indifferent; disinterested."

With that information, I discovered the meaning of the Moroni passages:

Yea, come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and [stand aloof from] all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness [refuse evil to be admitted, or even refuse it the dignity of acknowledging its admittance as a possibility] and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise [stand aloof from the embrace of] the power of God.

And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and [do not stand aloof from the embrace which is symbolic of] his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.