

# Knowing good from evil

Last week Joel asked,

The principle of knowing the good and the bad. It seems to me that we do not need to know all the bad to know all the good. D&C 19:17 seems to say that Jesus knew all the bad so that we would not need to experience that in order to comprehend all the good. Do you have any insight into how we would be able to comprehend all the good without knowing all the bad. I think that it would be because of our covenantal relationship with Christ. But things just don't seem to add up. Alma 7:13 seems to imply that we could know it by the Spirit.

I had hoped someone else would tackle Joel's question. But no one did, so I'll give it a try. The scripture in Alma reads,

11 And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people.

12 And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities.

13 Now the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people, that he might blot out their transgressions according to the power of his deliverance; and now behold, this is the testimony which is in me. (Alma 7:11-13)

That description of the Saviour's experiences in this world, sound remarkably like what Alma said at the Waters of Mormon.

8 And it came to pass that he said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light;

9 Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort, and to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God, and be numbered with those of the first resurrection, that ye may have eternal life—

10 Now I say unto you, if this be the desire of your hearts, what have you against being baptized in the name of the Lord, as a witness before him that ye have entered into a covenant with him, that ye will serve him and keep his commandments, that he may pour

out his Spirit more abundantly upon you? (Mosiah 18:8-10.)

It appears to me, that - within the limits of one's abilities - one is required to do the same thing during one's earthly experience that the Saviour did during his. Other scriptures suggest that as well. The command to sacrifice a broken heart and contrite spirit is also analogous to the Saviour's atoning sacrifice.

In the ancient world, one's "heart" was the seat of one's intellect as well as one's emotions. Consequently, the scriptures which reflect the thinking of its authors, say the heart can be taught; it thinks, plans, contrives and reasons. The heart also loves, hates, rejoices, sorrows, and feels every other emotion. In short, all of their rational and academic thinking happened in their heart. (There is one exception, and that is pity. If one were to watch a puppy hit by a car, the place where one would feel compassion is right in the pit of the stomach, thus the phrase, "bowls of mercy.")

The phrase "the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12, Alma 18:32, D&C 33:1) is all inclusive. It encompasses all the emotional and rational reasons one can invent to justify one's attitudes, motives, prejudices, beliefs, and actions. Since there is nothing one does, or says, or thinks whose emotional or rational objective is not found in the heart, every purpose for which one acts is a "purpose of the heart."

The Saviour's command to the Nephites that they must offer a sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit was not a new concept. We can know what his words meant because he was paraphrasing the Psalms. For example, Psalm 34:18, "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." Thus a good Hebrew lexicon can teach us the meaning of the words in the Book of Mormon.

The Hebrew word translated "broken" means shattered - like an earthen pot that falls to the ground and does not have the internal strength to maintain its own structure. It breaks into many pieces. After that the pieces remain, but its structure is gone, and there is nothing left that can be called a pot. So what is a broken heart? It is the remains of the shattered motives - both rational and emotional - with which one once drove one's Self, and by which one once justified all one's attitudes and actions. It is a shattering of all of the old contrivances with which one covered one's Self, and that led one to define one's Self in terms of its things - self-aggrandizement and self-gratification - and to seek to appear to be what one is not.

It seems to me that having a broken heart is the same as removing the masks that hide one from other people - but more especially, that hide one from one's Self. It is not letting any temporal gratification get in the way of one's eternal mission. It is Abinadi returning to the city, and saying "You can't kill me until after I have done what God sent me here to do." It is a mother's just being a mother, notwithstanding her past ambition and preparation, and her present skills could let her achieve a greatness that the world would admire. It is Jesus submitting himself to be mocked and hung on the cross.

A broken heart and a contrite spirit are not the same thing.

In the phrase “contrite spirit,” spirit means spirit - that pre-mortal part of us that gives individual personality and life to our physical bodies. It is the spirit - not the physical person’s emotions or attitudes - that must be contrite.

“Contrite” does not mean “humble” or anything like “downcast.” It means pulverized - beaten to powder. The English word “contrite” means the same thing as the Hebrew word from which it is translated. And since they both mean the same thing, it is easier for me to understand an analysis of the English version.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* says the word "contrite" is derived from a Latin word, *contritus*, which is a compound of *con* meaning "together," and *terere*, meaning "rub, triturate [grind to dust], bray [grind to powder], grind." The OED adds that "contrite" is to be "bruised, crushed; worn or broken by rubbing," and that "contrition" means, "the action of rubbing of things together or against each other; grinding, pounding or bruising, so as to comminute [reduce to small particles] or pulverize." So the literal meaning of contrite has to do with taking something large, then bruising it, beating it, or grinding it, until it becomes something very small - like powder. In one very important respect that is not the same as "broken." In "broken" there is a necessary force which effects the breaking, but that force might be internal (such as being too hot, too cold, or too heavy) as well as external. However, in "contrite" the pulverizing force must be something other than the thing being crushed. Nothing can grind itself. In order to have a contrite spirit, there must be a GRINDER as well as a GRINDED.

In Gethsemane the Saviour did no sin, but he experienced the consequences of all our sins. In the most powerful of all possible meanings of the word, his spirit was made contrite.

Now with that as background, let me try to address Joel’s question:

The masks and facades one wears restrict, as well as obscure, one’s Self. Yet, it is only the Self who hides behind the masks who has the power to love unfeigned. As I consider it, I think the opposite of charity is not hatred, rather it is contempt. (Hatred is a product of contempt, contempt is not a product of hatred). More simply put: the opposite of love is just not bothering to care. It seems to me that one can be pure in heart only after one has removed the masks that disable one’s ability to love others. Then one is predisposed to rejoice with others because they rejoice, and, more to the point, to hurt with others because they hurt. In this way, I suspect, it is possible - actually necessary - for one to experience the sorrows, and the other consequences of sin, without ever having to experience the sins themselves. That is, because one has charity, one’s empathy, understanding, wisdom, and kindness reach far beyond the sin and pain one has actually experienced.