

Faith, Hope, and Charity

Bruce T. Forbes, 2013

(Portions of this essay are quoted from my 1995 book “Faith, Grace and Works: A Chord in the Hymn of Salvation”.)

The concept of ‘Faith, Grace, and Works’ is often identified by Christians as somehow ‘passive’ concepts which save us - they are concepts about which we must have some sort of belief, but for some mysterious reason do nothing more about! ‘Faith, Hope, and Charity’, however, denotes activity in the minds of most - it conveys the idea that we must not only believe but how we must act upon that belief as well.

Just as with Faith, Grace, and Works, there are various clues as to how these three new attributes fit together. One such clue is found in the teachings of Alma: “*And see that ye have faith, hope, and charity, and then ye will always abound in good works.*” (Alma 7:24)

Another by Moroni: “. . . *by faith all things are fulfilled. Wherefore, whoso believeth in [or, has faith in] God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God.*” (Ether 12:3-4, comment by author.)

When describing the attributes needed to qualify for the work of the ministry, the Lord told Joseph Smith that - “. . . *faith, hope, charity, and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualify him for the ministry.*” (Doctrine & Covenants 4:5)

To Oliver Cowdery: “. . . *Be patient; be sober; be temperate; have patience, faith, hope, and charity.*” (Doctrine & Covenants 6:19)

To Joseph Knight, Sr.: “*And no one can assist in this work except he shall be humble and full of love, having faith, hope, and charity, being temperate in all things, whatsoever shall be entrusted to his care.*” (Doctrine & Covenants 12:8)

To Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer He said that “. . . *if you have not faith, hope, and charity, you can do nothing.*” (Doctrine & Covenants 18:19)

Moroni on Faith, Hope, and Charity

Undoubtedly the most comprehensive discourses harmonizing the principles of Faith, Hope, and Charity are found in the various writings of Nephite prophet Moroni. First, we turn to the Book of Ether:

Behold, I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness, and I will show unto them that faith, hope, and charity bringeth unto me - the fountain of all righteousness.

And I, Moroni, having heard these words, was comforted, and said: O Lord, thy righteous will be done, for I know that thou workest unto the children of men according

to their faith; For the brother of Jared said unto the mountain Zerin, Remove - and it was removed. And if he had not had faith it would not have moved; wherefore thou workest after men have faith. "For thus didst thou manifest thyself unto thy disciples [meaning His Nephite disciples]; for after they had faith, and did speak in thy name, thou didst show thyself unto them in great power. And I also remember that thou hast said that thou hast prepared a house for man, yea, even among the mansions of thy Father, in which man might have a more excellent hope; wherefore man must hope, or he cannot receive an inheritance in the place which thou hast prepared." (Ether 12:28-32, note added.)

He continues, giving yet another definition of charity:

And again, I remember that thou hast said that thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world, that thou mightest take it again to prepare a place for the children of men. And now I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity; wherefore, except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father. Wherefore, I know by this thing which thou hast said, that if the Gentiles have not charity, because of our weakness, that thou wilt prove them, and take away their talent, yea, even that which they have received, and give unto them who shall have more abundantly.

And it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord that he would give unto the Gentiles grace, that they might have charity." (Ether 12:33-37)

Next, we find the following in the book bearing his own name:

Wherefore, there must be faith; and if there must be faith there must also be hope; and if there must be hope there must also be charity. And except ye have charity ye can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God; neither can ye if ye have no hope. And if ye have no hope ye must needs be in despair; and despair cometh because of iniquity. And Christ truly said unto our fathers: If ye have faith ye can do all things which are expedient unto me. And now I speak unto all the ends of the earth - that if the day cometh that the power and gifts of God shall be done away among you, it shall be because of unbelief. (Moroni 10:20-25)

Faith – the First Step

But perhaps the greatest single discourse on Faith, Hope, and Charity contained in all the holy writings was given by Moroni's father - the prophet Mormon. It was a discourse he'd given "unto the people, as he taught them in the synagogue which they had built for the place of worship" (Moroni 7:1) and was wisely quoted by Moroni for the benefit of the present-day reader. After teaching the people how to distinguish good from evil and that good is of God while evil is of Satan, he launches into the subject of faith:

And now I come to that faith, of which I said I would speak; and I will tell you whereby

ye may lay hold on every good thing. 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. And God also declared unto prophets, by his own mouth, that Christ should come.

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. 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. 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.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, have miracles ceased because Christ has 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? 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.

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. For behold, they are subject to 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. And the office of their ministry is to call men unto repentance, and to fulfill 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. 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 man.

And Christ hath said: If ye will have faith in me ye shall have power to do whatsoever thing is expedient in me. 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.

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? 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?

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. 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.

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.” (Moroni 7:21-39)

By faith we will have the power to do whatever is expedient. By faith the Holy Ghost will have a place in our hearts. By faith angels will appear and minister unto mankind. By faith we ask in Christ’s name for that which is good and we will receive. By faith in His name we gain salvation!

From Faith to Hope

The discourse continues:

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? 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.

Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope. And again, behold I say unto you that he cannot have faith and hope, save he be meek and lowly of heart. If so, his faith and hope is vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly; and if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confess by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must have charity; for if he have not charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity. (Moroni 7:40-44)

Charity – the Final Note

Charity follows fast on the heels of Faith and Hope - Charity is the physical manifestation and proof of our Faith and Hope. Mormon begins by describing the characteristics of charity; his words so similar to the teachings of the Apostle Paul that the humble reader has to wonder if there were once an Old Testament source we no longer possess:

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, endureth all things. (Moroni 7:45)

He continues with the importance of charity:

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 - But charity is the pure love of Christ, and endureth forever; and whoso is found possessed of it at the last day, it shall be well with him.

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, pray unto the Father with all 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 7:46-48)

How do we become as perfect as the Father? Through faith in God and in Jesus Christ, through Hope in Christ and His atoning sacrifice He made in our behalf, and through developing the godly attribute of Charity.

HOPE:

an ANCHOR for the SOUL; *“Confident Expectation”*

Once we have Faith in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ, another divine attribute automatically displays itself in our lives. Building on the foundation of Faith acted upon, we receive the promised blessings (Grace), and, still not visually seeing the goal in mind, we have greater confidence we are on the right path. And, we have a greater expectation as to our future reward and condition. Faith, nurtured by our obedience and rewarded by Grace, becomes Hope.

Wherefore, whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God. (Ether 12:4)

Thus Faith and Hope and inseparable partners. Hope enables our Faith to continue to grow and blossom. Hope enables Faith to be turned into actions that will ensure our salvation.

. . . How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope? 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 our faith in him, according to the promise. Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope.

And again, behold I say unto you that he cannot have faith and hope, save he be meek and lowly of heart. If so, his faith and hope is vain, for none is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly; and if a man be meek and lowly in heart, and confess by the power of the Holy Ghost that Jesus is the Christ, he must have charity; for if he have not

charity he is nothing; wherefore he must needs have charity." (Moroni 7:40-44)

Hope in the Lord

The word 'atonement' is not derived from a Hebrew, Greek, or Latin source. It's an actual English word-phrase that describes not only the reward of the faithful but also the process by which it is achieved. As we strive to gain the rewards the Father and Son have waiting for us, we begin to feel closeness, a union, a oneness with Deity - an "at-one-ment". This type of perfection has been explained:

. . . It is like a merger. If you take a small, bankrupt firm that is about to go under and merge it with a corporate giant, what happens? Their assests and liabilities flow together, and the new entity that is created is solvent.

This is similar to what happens spiritually when we enter into a covenant with the Savior. We have liabilities; he has assests. So he proposes a covenant relationship. Jesus is sometimes called the Bridegroom and the Church the Bride, because of their close association under the covenant. After the covenant is made, I become one with Christ, and as partners we work together toward my exaltation. My liabilities and his assests flow into each other. I do all that I can do, and he does what I cannot yet do. For now, in partnership we are perfect, through His perfection." (Stephan E. Robinson, "Believing Christ" (ENSIGN of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) Volume 22 Number 4)

The sacrifice of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, broke the bands of death and the grave, and it guarantees that no matter what sort of life we have led, we will still be resurrected - saved from death and renewed to some degree of eternal life.

Also, through His awful suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, He not only paid the price demanded by the Father, but suffered the torment that transgressions and sins inflict upon mankind as well - a price fully paid if we but follow Him who paid the debt.

Because of His sacrifice, there is no truth to the exclamations "I could never make it to Heaven!", and "I could never be forgiven!" The price is paid in full - the price is pre-paid! And the contract has been drawn. All that holds us back is our pride or our disbelief that such a miracle can actually occur.

Because of the mission of the Savior, we can raise our eyes out of the dark mists of sin and transgression and look once again towards the light. We are able move from the valleys of our personal human weakness to the mountaintops where those who receive divine aid stand in the light of accomplishment and fulfillment. We realize we are not trapped by uncontrollable forces around us, but that how we handle this opposition determines the greatness to which we will ascend to in the next life. The name we give this divine feeling of aspiration is Hope.

. . . Hope . . . blesses us with the state of mind we need to deal with the gap between where we are and where we seek to be. It is the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, who fills us with his hope as the remission of our sins makes us lowly of heart and meek enough to receive him. (See Moroni 8:25-26.) I believe this endowment can literally fill our minds

in a pure and permanent form with the kind of encouragement and confidence we might find in talking with a close friend who gives us perspective about a difficult problem. We go away from such a conversation with confidence that there is light at the end of our dark tunnels and somehow everything will be all right. That kind of hope can be literally life-sustaining when it is given us by the Savior, for the light at the end of life's darkest tunnels is the Light and the Life of the World. (Bruce C. Hafen, THE BROKEN HEART: APPLYING THE ATONEMENT TO LIFE'S EXPERIENCES (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book CO, 1989) pg. 19)

At the end of the dark mists of despair, opposition, the self-doubt, there is One who stands, arms open and reaching to help. It is through Him that the feeling of "at-one-ment" heals the pain caused by sin and transgression, the making of wrong choices, despair, loneliness, opposition, and all other pains of human existence.

And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust. Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. (Romans 15:12-13)

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope . . . (1 Timothy 1:1)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead . . . (1 Peter 1:3)

You must therefore be like men stripped for action, perfectly self-controlled. Fix your hopes on the gift of grace which is to be yours when Jesus Christ is revealed. (1 Peter 1:13, New English Bible)

For, for this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before us. (Jacob 4:4)

All these had departed the mortal life, firm in the hope of a glorious resurrection, through the grace of God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. (Doctrine & Covenants 138:14)

Faith + Works = Hope

Hope is also the desire all faithful peoples have in gaining eternal salvation - not a intangible, spur-of-the-moment desire, but an honest, heartfelt desire coupled with divine assurance that the reward

can be obtained. This desire, coupled with righteous actions, brings the assurance that what we are doing is correct and the Lord will indeed reward us as He has promised. As we are faithful to His teachings and commandments, this feeling of "at-one-ment" comes upon us and our eyes begin to lift, seeing the light at the end of the spiritual tunnel. But it is only the light we see at first, not the whole heavenly landscape! As Alma taught, ". . . *if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.*" (Alma 32:21) Additional light is cast on Alma's words when we read Paul's Epistle to the Romans:

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. (Romans 8:24-25)

This almost sounds like Faith, just under another name! Elder Neal A. Maxwell has said -

It is to be understood, however, that hope is not the same as perfect knowledge. (See Alma 32:21.) Once we have actually seen, said Paul, it "is not hope." (Romans 8:24.) Thus hope, like faith, is not quite knowledge. Yet, being at the border of knowledge, we can see through "glass darkly" enough of the future to affect how we live today. (Neal A. Maxwell, *Notwithstanding My Weakness*, p.42)

This is why the goal of our mortal existence - eternal life with our Father in Heaven - has been kept from our eyes; that we might continue to develop hope and thereby keep our faith alive. Growing faith and hope become spiritual anchors in a dark and stormy world of spiritual darkness and confusion:

. . . The hope set before us . . . we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil . . . (Hebrews 6:18-19)

As with any gospel principle, action is involved. Once there is hope, this action must follow if that hope is to grow sufficient for salvation.

Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. (1 Corinthians 9:10)

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father . . . (1 Thessalonians 1:3)

And now, my beloved brethren, after ye have gotten into this strait and narrow path, I would ask if all is done? Behold, I say unto you, Nay; for ye have not come thus far save it were by the word of Christ with unshaken faith in him, relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save. Wherefore, ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore,

if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life. (2 Nephi 31:19-20)

But before ye seek for riches, seek ye first the kingdom of God. And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good - to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted. (Jacob 2:18-19)

. . . wherefore man must hope, or he cannot receive an inheritance in the place which thou hast prepared. (Ether 12:32)

Results of Hope

That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:7)

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given us. (Romans 5:1-5)

This last verse has been summarized in this way:

Paul also taught the related doctrine of salvation by grace. Latter-day Saints recognize at least four ways in which Paul spoke of salvation as an operation of the grace of God. First, through the Atonement of Christ, a free gift, Adam's posterity is not accountable for the transgression of Adam (Rom. 5:18-21). Second, it naturally follows that death - a consequence of Adam's transgression - will be done away by the gift of resurrection that will be graciously given to all human beings (1 Cor. 15:21-22). Third, the fact that God has offered a new covenant of faith in place of the old rules of performances and ordinances, which mankind then was not able to live perfectly, is in itself an act of grace. And fourth, that the Savior volunteered to suffer and die for the sake of others is the greatest expression of the grace of God. Thus, salvation is accessible to mankind only through the gracious acts and gifts of God. As Paul said, "We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2). However, in Paul's theology, the doctrines of salvation by grace and justification by faith do not eliminate but require the absolute necessity for high personal standards of conduct (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21). (Encyclopedia of Mormonism, Vol. 3, PAUL)

CHARITY: Perfect, Christ-like Love

Charity, an aspect of ‘works’, is yet another element of God’s plan for mankind which is often poorly defined by religionists. Some define it as simply a form of love, and they do have a good foundation for this:

. . . the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love . . . (2 Nephi 26:30)

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. (Moroni 7:47)

I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love; wherefore, all children are like unto me; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love . . . (Moroni 8:17)

But charity, as spoken of in the scriptures, is more than just the outward emotion of love.

Charity . . . the bond of perfectness and peace. (Doctrine & Covenants 88:125)

Charity also denotes action. This action, which is literally love in action, is sometimes called ‘service’.

Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)

The kind of religion which is without fault in the sight of God our Father is this: to go to the help of orphans and widows in their distress and keep oneself untarnished by the world. (James 1:27, New English Bible)

. . . thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself . . . (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 5:43, 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; 3 Nephi 12:43)

So charity, as we understand it, is a Christ-like love for all others. Not only is it an emotion, but it is also a vital principle of action. A modern Apostle has said of Charity:

Above all the attributes of godliness and perfection, charity is the one most devoutly to be desired. Charity is more than love, far more; it is everlasting love, perfect love, the pure love of Christ which endureth forever. It is love so centered in righteousness that the possessor has no aim or desire except for the eternal welfare of his own soul and for the souls of those around him. (McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, pg. 121)

Charity Is Love

In three accounts of Christ's mortal ministry, we are told of a question put to Him, tempting Him: "Which is the first commandment of all?" He answered:

. . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:28-31; see also Matthew 22:34-40 and Luke 10:25-28)

In the account referred to by Matthew and Mark, the one who asked this question replied:

. . . Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

And when Jesus saw that he had answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God . . . (Mark 12:32-34)¹

In the book of Luke, however, the person questioning Christ perhaps wished to justify his lack of charity, and asked: "...who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29) Christ's reply has become the one great, standard teaching on 'loving thy neighbor' found in all of written scripture:

. . . A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked upon him, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, When I come again, I will repay thee. (Luke 10:30-35)

Then the Master Teacher asked a question of the listener:

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. (Luke 10:36-37)

¹ See also the incident with the Rich Young Man for similar teachings: Matthew 19:16-26, Mark 10:17-27, Luke 18:18-27.

Priests and Levites of Christ's day supposedly led a life of service to God and man. And yet in this hopefully-fictitious story they turned their backs on one who needed it most desperately. All too often each of us falls into this trap - we feel that because we fulfill our church callings to a sufficient level and have made our required once-a-month Home Teaching visit, we have properly served God and man. In this story it took a Samaritan - a man considered a religious and racial enemy to those Christ taught - to remind the listeners of their real duties to their fellow man.

It is important to remember that programs do not supersede our individual actions. There may be programs and processes in place to get us out to perform acts of charity, but this does not stop us from helping someone in need. If we know the old widow across the street has a flat tire on her car, we shouldn't take all day to get hold of her home teacher so he can do it - we should walk across the street and simply help.

Charity Is Service

Whenever I think of service, my mind goes immediately to the great address of King Benjamin to his people. In this discourse are found some of the greatest teachings on why we should serve that I know of in the scriptures. He began by reaffirming the fact that, although he was a king, he was no better than any other person in the kingdom:

I say unto you that as I have been suffered to spend my days in your service, even up to this time, and have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you... And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne - and all these things which I have spoken, ye yourselves are witnesses this day.

Yet, my brethren, I have not done these things that I might boast, neither do I tell these things that thereby I might accuse you; but I tell you these things that ye may know that I can answer a clear conscience before God this day. Behold, I say unto you that because I said unto you that I had spent my days in your service, I do not desire to boast, for I had only been in the service of God. And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God. (Mosiah 2:12-17)

Then he turned the focus of the address from himself to the listener:

Behold, ye have called me your king; and if I, whom ye call your king, do labor to serve you, then ought not ye to labor to serve one another? And behold also, if I, whom ye call your king, who has spent his days in your service, and yet has been in the service of God, do merit any thanks from you, O how you ought to thank your heavenly King! I say unto you, my brethren, that if you should render all the thanks and praise which your whole soul has power to possess, to that God who has created you, and has kept and preserved you, and has caused that ye should rejoice, and has granted that ye should live in peace one with another - I say unto you that if ye should serve him who has created you from

the beginning, and is preserving you from day to day, by lending you breath, that ye may live and move according to your own will, and even supporting you from one moment to another - I say, if ye should serve him with all your whole souls yet ye would be unprofitable servants. (Mosiah 2:18-22)

‘What?!’ the average Christian might exclaim, ‘How could we possibly be unprofitable servants?’ King Benjamin answers this very valid question by explaining that -

. . . in the first place, he hath created you, and granted unto you your lives, for which ye are indebted unto him. And secondly, he doth require that ye should do as he hath commanded you; for which if ye do, he doth immediately bless you; and therefore he hath paid you. And ye are still indebted unto him, and are, and will be, forever and ever; therefore, of what have ye to boast?

And now I ask, can ye say aught of yourselves? I answer you, Nay. Ye cannot say that ye are even as much as the dust of the earth; yet ye were created of the dust of the earth; but behold, it belongeth to him who created you. (Mosiah 2:23-25)

King Benjamin was but a type, or similitude, of Christ our King, who spent His earthly ministry serving only others; never Himself. Can we do otherwise?

Justified by our Charity

It is interesting to note that in Hebrew the word used for ‘charity’ does not define it as we Christians define it. We Christians see ‘charity’ as an action we take solely towards others. But the Hebrew word ‘tsadaq’ (tsaw-dak’) means much more – it is the equivalent of ‘to justify’ According to STRONG’S CONCORDANCE, it is used for five main concepts of justification:

First - to be just; righteous.

Second - to have a just cause; be in the right; to be just before God; to be righteous in conduct and character.

Third - to be put/made right.

Fourth - make to appear righteous, make someone righteous.

Fifth - to do/bring justice (in administering law); to declare righteous; vindicate the cause of; save; to make righteous, turn to righteousness.

If we combine this Christian concept of charity with the Hebrew word from which the concept came, we learn that ‘charity’ and ‘justification’ – as in the justification of our salvation, redemption, and exaltation - hangs upon the actions and activities we take in the form of charity and service to other people.

STRONG’S CONCORDANCE also teaches us that ‘tsadaq’ comes from the root word ‘dashen’; its literal translation is ‘vigorous, stalwart ones’. In the Old Testament it is translated as ‘fat’ in these three passages:

All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul. (Psalms 22:29)

They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing . . . (Psalms 92:14)

Then shall he give the rain of thy seed, that thou shalt sow the ground withal; and bread of the increase of the earth, and it shall be fat and plenteous: in that day shall thy cattle feed in large pastures. (Isaiah 30:23)

Could this solve the mystery of the use of the word ‘fat’ and ‘fatness’ in the Book of Mormon?

Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat. (2 Nephi 15:17)

Wherefore, do not spend money for that which is of no worth, nor your labor for that which cannot satisfy. Hearken diligently unto me, and remember the words which I have spoken; and come unto the Holy One of Israel, and feast upon that which perisheth not, neither can be corrupted, and let your soul delight in fatness. (2 Nephi 9:51)

Nephi was not encouraging his people to indulge in gluttony (as we sometimes would like to think) – he was encouraging them to become a ‘stalwart, vigorous’ people by justifying themselves before the Lord through their charitable actions and activities towards others.

Charity and Eternal Life

This gift of life is so great a blessing - what can we do to even come close to repaying the Almighty for such a gift? What does He require of us in return?

. . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:28-31) . . . thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself . . . (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 5:43; See also Matthew 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; 3 Nephi 12:43)

It is not necessarily the extent of our knowledge or how well we fulfil our church callings by which we will be judged, although they will certainly be considered - after all, they are manifestations of our faith. We will instead be judged on how well we have served God and our fellow man. Consider the words of Christ in what has become known as the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. This parable describes those who will be saved, to stand on the right hand of God. All nations will be gathered to stand before the King, who will then divide the wicked from the righteous:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an

hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee, or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me." (Matthew 25:34-40)

Then the King turns to the wicked on His left and says -

. . . Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. (Matthew 25:41-46)
