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Fullness of the Gospel

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Fullness of the Gospel

In D&C 20:89 the Lord declared that the Book of Mormon contains “the fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.” The critics have been quick to point out that the Book of Mormon does not mention unique LDS doctrines such as the plurality of Gods, eternal progression, baptism for the dead, degrees of glory, the pre-mortal existence, and so forth. How can the Book of Mormon contain the “fulness of the Gospel” if these important LDS teachings are absent?

First we must ask the question: what, according to the Book of Mormon, is the Gospel? As Noel Reynolds has shown, the Book of Mormon defines the gospel as a six-point formula of salvation by bringing us to Christ. These six points include faith, repentance, baptism, the Holy Ghost, enduring to the end, and eternal life.¹ Acceptance and adherence to these six points in the Book of Mormon, however, bring souls to Christ and meets the requirements for entrance into the celestial kingdom.

While LDS theology teaches that all people—except the “sons of perdition”—will be saved to some degree of glory, those who inherit the celestial kingdom are “they who received the testimony of Jesus and believed on his name and were baptized after the manner of his burial, being buried in the water in his name... and receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands...and who overcome by faith, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise...” (D&C 76:51–53). The gospel, in its most basic sense, is the collection of requirements necessary to return to God. The “fulness of the Gospel” contained in the Book of Mormon teaches those things necessary for our salvation in the celestial kingdom.

Other ancillary teachings are necessary for exaltation within the celestial kingdom. While the Book of Mormon contains the fulness of those teachings necessary to return to God, it does not contain everything that the Lord would have us know. The prophet Mormon, for example, tells us that he included only the “lesser part” of those things that Jesus taught to Nephites, and that those who read and accept the Book of Mormon would have “greater things” made manifest (see 3 Nephi 26:8–9 and Alma 26:22). While these additional teachings are not explicitly mentioned in

the Book of Mormon, some are hinted at or described. Concepts such as deification, the plurality of Gods, the pre-mortal existence, and degrees of glory are implicitly present within the pages of the Nephite scriptures.²

Some critics remain unsatisfied when it is shown that the Book of Mormon contains all the teachings necessary for salvation. If the precepts taught by the Book of Mormon are nothing more than faith, repentance, baptism, and the Holy Ghost, argue the critics, then the Book of Mormon is not only unnecessary (because the same things are found in the Bible), but Mormons are guilty of pulling a bait and switch by drawing people into the Church with biblical doctrines and then ambushing them with (supposedly) non-biblical, uniquely LDS doctrines.

While the Book of Mormon is not unique in teaching the six basic elements of the gospel, it is unique in the clarity and unambiguity in teaching these precepts. For brevity this chapter examines the Book of Mormon's teachings of the first five principles: faith, repentance, baptism, the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end.

Faith

While the Book of Mormon acknowledges the importance of faith in salvation, “And behold, he cometh to redeem those who will be baptized unto repentance, through faith on his name” (Alma 9:27; see also Mosiah 3:12), and recognizes that faith in Christ is a necessary part of membership in His Church (Moroni 7:39), it also explains that faith and works are both necessary (Alma 32:20).

And it is requisite with the justice of God that men should be judged according to their works; and if their works were good in this life, and the desires of their hearts were good, that they should also, at the last day, be restored unto that which is good (Alma 41:3).

...for the day should come that they must be judged of their works, yea, even the works which were done by the temporal body in their days of probation (1 Nephi 15:32).

The Book of Mormon also gives us a clearer understanding of the nature of faith. For instance hope is the first step in acquiring faith (Moroni 7:40). I know of no better definition of faith, and how to acquire it, than Alma chapter 32 (see especially verses 21–27).

Repentance

In the Book of Mormon we learn that repentance is necessary for a remission of sins (2 Nephi 31:17) and those who do not repent incur the demands of divine justice (Mosiah 2:38). Life is a probationary state, the Book of Mormon teaches—a

time to prepare to meet God; a time granted by God to repent and to prepare for the afterlife (Alma 12:24).

Faith, repentance, “good works,” and prayer, notes Alma, open up the mysteries of God (Alma 26:22). True repentance involves godly sorrow—sorrow for unrighteousness. The wicked are often sorry because they got caught, not because they truly want to repent (Mormon 2:13). The Book of Mormon explains that there is no deathbed repentance because, after death, we will be possessed of the same spirit as in mortality (Alma 34:34).

Baptism

In the Book of Mormon we learn that baptism is necessary not only for entrance into Christ’s church (Mosiah 18:17), but for salvation in the celestial kingdom (2 Nephi 9:23–24). Children, however, are innocent and do not require baptism (Moroni 8:9–10). Not only is authority from God required to perform baptisms (3 Nephi 7:25), but one must be worthy to receive baptism (Mormon 9:29). The Book of Mormon explains that baptism is to be done by immersion (3 Nephi 11:26), that it precedes the gift of the Holy Ghost (2 Nephi 31:12–13), and that baptism is the “first fruits” of repentance (Moroni 8:25). The Book of Mormon even goes as far as to reveal the baptismal prayer (3 Nephi 11:25). Can critics honestly claim that the Book of Mormon adds no light to the limited understanding of baptism as revealed in the Bible?

Gift of the Holy Ghost

Thanks to the Book of Mormon, we know that the mysteries of God are unfolded by the power of the Holy Ghost (1 Nephi 10:17–19) and by the power of the Holy Ghost the Lord manifests himself unto all those who believe in Him (2 Nephi 26:13).

Clarifying one of Christ’s beatitudes, those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” are blessed to be “filled with the Holy Ghost,” whereas the Bible just says, “filled” (compare 3 Nephi 12:6 with Matthew 5:6). While the Book of Mormon, like the Bible, tells us that the gift of the Holy Ghost is given to those who follow Christ into baptism (2 Nephi 31:12–14), the Book of Mormon reveals that the power to give the Holy Ghost was done by the laying on of hands (Moroni 2:2–3) by those who had the authority to give the power of the Holy Ghost.

Enduring to the End

Searching the scriptures for the phrase “endure to the end” (or some variation) yields some interesting results. In the Bible, all such phrases are limited to the New Testament. The only three verses that use this phrase are the following:

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And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that *endureth to the end* shall be saved (Matthew 10:22; emphasis added).

And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall *endure unto the end*, the same shall be saved (Mark 13:13; emphasis added).

But he that shall *endure unto the end*, the same shall be saved (Matthew 24:13; emphasis added).

The first two verses are quotes from the Savior talking about persecution. These passages seem to suggest that if those who are persecuted will endure to the end (suffer their persecution), they will eventually see relief. The second verse, from Mark, also deals with the calamities that are to precede the Second Coming. The last verse, from Matthew, is in a section that also deals with the calamities preceding the Second Coming and similarly suggests an endurance of persecution.

As far as I know, there is only one other New Testament scripture that deals with enduring and salvation.

Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (2 Timothy 2:10).

Paul seems to be saying here that he is willing to endure all the troubles so that the church members can hear the gospel.

While the Bible links salvation to enduring to the end, it does so somewhat ambiguously because of the context of persecution. Generally, most people associate the biblical “endure unto the end” with pain and suffering. In the Greek, however, “endure” or *hupomeno* means to wait, be patient, or persist in doing while “end” or *teleios* means to be finished or completed or perfect (a version of this same word is found in Matthew 5:48 which exhorts Christ’s followers to be “perfect [teleios] even as your Father in Heaven is perfect [teleios]”). A more correct translation of “endure unto the end” might be standing firm, or persisting with steadfastness until the culmination of the salvation process (i.e., exaltation).³

There are other biblical passages, which allude to salvation or exaltation for those who endure to the end, but these verses are generally not as plain as those found in the Book of Mormon in which enduring to the end is clearly taught as a basic gospel principle—part of the salvation and exaltation process.⁴ The Book of Mormon uses the phrase “endure to the end” (or some variation) sixteen times.⁵ In some Book of Mormon verses we can see that enduring to the end is associated with baptism and/or repentance and is required for salvation (2 Nephi 9:24). In other Book of Mormon verses we see that “eternal life” or exaltation is the reward for the righteous who “endure unto the end” (3 Nephi 15:9).

While the Book of Mormon, like the Bible, teaches those things necessary for salvation, the Book of Mormon explains them more clearly and more precisely.

Other Unique Insights

In addition to basic gospel principles, the Book of Mormon also gives us unique teachings on such things as the sacramental prayers (Moroni, chapters 4 and 5), and the fact that Satan—an angel fallen from heaven—is miserable and “he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself” (2 Nephi 2:27). Thanks to the Book of Mormon, we know that the fall of Adam and Eve was a positive and necessary step in man’s progression (2 Nephi 2:19–25); that the early Christian Church in Jerusalem fell into apostasy (1 Nephi 3:1–6); that some of the “plain” and “precious” teachings of the gospel were taken from the Bible (1 Nephi 13:24–29); that Christ’s atonement reaches those who died ignorant of the gospel (Mosiah 3:11); that all mankind will be resurrected, regardless of religious belief (2 Nephi 9:22; Mormon 9:13); and that Christ’s suffering was so great that He literally bled from His pores in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mosiah 3:7). These are just a sampling of the many unique or more clearly taught doctrines found in the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon is singular in how it was revealed to mankind, and it is a unique second witness to the divinity of Christ and the reality of the Resurrection. In a world where it is popular to brush away Christ’s earthly ministry with naturalistic explanations, the Book of Mormon testifies to the reality of Christ, His earthly mission as recorded in the Bible, and the eschatological teachings associated with Christianity. Lastly, the Book of Mormon is unique in its power as a spiritual conduit for the Holy Ghost’s testimony of the divinity of Christ and the truthfulness of the Restored Gospel.

Primary Sources

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