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THE LORD'S PART IN REPENTANCE

"And now behold, I ask of you, my BRETHREN OF THE CHURCH, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change IN YOUR HEARTS." (Alma 5:14)

The first suggestion that I wish to make is that there are two parts to repentance. The part that you do and the part that the Lord does. What do you do? You keep the commandments to the best of your ability, and when your conscience finally awakens from slumber you confess your sins to the Lord and to anyone else that the Lord may instruct, oft times accompanied by intense fasting and prayer. That's what you do. Now, what does the Lord do? He forgives you in a revelation DIRECTLY to you. This was demonstrated in the case of Enos, Alma and all of the subjects of King Benjamin. Perhaps you are still puzzled, but you won't be when you experience what I'm talking about. Now you may ask, "HOW DO I CHANGE? You see I have some bad habits. They have been plaguing my conscience. How do I actually make the change?" That's the question that really needs to be answered.

That brings us to one of the most important aspects of repentance, the part the Lord does. "And just what does the Lord do?" you ask. HE CHANGES YOU BY GIFT. That is exactly the way it happens. And what effort do you put in at this point? Accept the gift, and praise the Lord evermore. Didn't that sound simple? It is. The Lord has reduced everything to simplicity. It is Satan who throws in the complexities. Let's turn to some of the previous accounts and see if we can turn your unbelief to BELIEF. Let's start with Alma. Do you remember? He was in a horizontal position. His father Alma, the priest, and congregation had been fasting and praying for him. He couldn't move his limbs. The Lord showed him an instant replay of his sins. After three days he suddenly stood up, bid them to be of good comfort, and delivered a sermon to his father, Alma, the prophet, and the rest of those assembled. The most interesting thing about his sermon is that it is now scripture and binding upon us.

For, said he, I have repented of my sins, (He repented while lying flat on his back, unable to move, and the Lord changed him) and have been redeemed of the Lord; behold I am born of the Spirit.

*And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, MEN and WOMEN, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, CHANGED from their carnal and fallen state, TO A STATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters. And **THUS THEY BECOME NEW CREATURES**: and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God.*

I say unto you, unless this be the case, they must be cast off; and this I know, because I was like to be cast off.

Nevertheless, after wandering through much tribulation, repenting nigh unto death, the LORD IN MERCY HATH SEEN FIT TO SNATCH ME OUT OF AN EVERLASTING BURNING, and I am born of God.

My soul hath been redeemed from the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. I was in the darkest abyss; but now I behold the marvelous light of God. My soul was racked with eternal torment; BUT I AM SNATCHED, and my soul is pained no more. (Mosiah 27:24-29)

Now let's return to the sermon of King Benjamin. He finished delivering the sermon that the angel had given him and the congregation was treated to an instant replay of their sins. It was the same thing that we just discussed about Alma. Listen to the description.

And they had viewed themselves in their own carnal state, even less than the dust of the earth. And they all cried aloud with one voice, saying:

O have mercy, and apply the atoning blood of Christ that we may receive forgiveness of our sins, and our hearts may be purified; for we believe in Jesus Christ, the son of God, who created heaven and earth, and all things; who shall come down among the children of men.

And it came to pass that after they had spoken these words the Spirit of the Lord came upon them, and they were filled with joy, having received a remission of their sins, and having peace of conscience, because of the exceeding faith which they had in Jesus Christ who should come, according to the words which King Benjamin had spoken unto them. (Mosiah 4:2-3)

King Benjamin didn't realize what had happened to the congregation.

*And now, it came to pass that when King Benjamin had thus spoken to his people, he sent among them, desiring to know of his people **IF THEY BELIEVED THE WORDS WHICH HE HAD SPOKEN TO THEM**.*

*And they all cried with one voice, saying: Yea, we **BELIEVE** all the words which thou hast spoken unto us; and also, we know of their surety and truth, because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, **WHICH HAS WROUGHT A MIGHTY CHANGE IN US**, or in our **HEARTS**, that we have **NO MORE DISPOSITION TO DO EVIL**, but to **DO GOOD CONTINUALLY**. (Mosiah 5:1-2)*

There it is. Do you believe it? The Lord changed them. The Lord changed their hearts. No longer did they desire to do evil. Their only desire was to do good continually. Now if you think that you can accomplish that mighty change in your hearts — go to it, but you'll never make it. That is the part that the Lord does. However, there is something that you must do. It has already been suggested. Keep the commandments. Confess your sins to the Lord and learn how to fast and pray properly. That's the part that you do.

Perhaps the story of Keith will illustrate the part that the Lord plays in repentance. Keith and I had been friends for a number of years. One day I found him knocking at my door. I was a little puzzled because our association was mainly on a Sunday basis. It was obvious that Keith had something on his mind. A two hour gospel discussion ensued. It was clear that Keith's conscience was being awakened. He was beginning to remember his transgressions and the Lord was giving him the same kind of guilt complex that Enos had experienced. A guilt complex is how the Lord needles us into repentance. The discussion centered around fasting and prayer and of what repentance really consists — CONFESSON OF SINS. It was difficult to determine how Keith was accepting the doctrine, but one thing was perfectly clear. He was intensely interested, although when he left, I felt that he was still somewhat skeptical. Perhaps I was wrong, because, he set himself on a program of fasting and prayer once a week along with a monthly two-day fast. How do you like that for determination? Recently he visited our Seventies group and it happened to be my turn to direct the discussion. You can guess to what subject it was directed. I said, "Keith, what were you talking to the Lord about in all that fasting and praying?" "Confessing my sins," he humbly answered. "Week after week?" I asked. "Yes," he responded. "Why were you doing it so often?" I asked. "I was seeking the Lord's forgiveness. I wanted to get rid of my nagging guilt complex." "Was your confession to the Lord general or specific?" I asked. "They were specific. What I had to do was lay each sin out before the Lord, describe the part that I played, admit my guilt and ask Him to forgive me," he answered. "Did you confess all of your sins to the Lord?" I asked. "Well, there was a slight problem. You see, the Lord kept adding to the list by reminding me of those which I had forgotten." "In other words, your memory was awakened." "That's right," Keith replied. "And how long did this intense fasting continue," I inquired. "Six months!"

Was Keith rewarded for his effort? Let me testify that he was. I'll never forget the day when I met him and we were about to enter the church. It was a bright summer day as the sun reflected off the light yellow brick of our chapel — a day when the sun can cause you to squint. But Keith was not squinting. I looked into his eyes and the pupils were enormous. I knew instantly what was happening. He was in the very process of being "born of the Spirit." He was a modern day Enos. The power of the Holy Ghost was upon him and every word that came from his lips was pure revelation. I envied him. He gave me a loving chastisement as we entered the chapel. Had Keith reached his goal? Had the Lord forgiven him? Without a doubt. Keith was no longer the same individual. Before this very day, and I'm sure that he will testify of this, he was vain, proud, cocky and arrogant. He'll smile when he reads this, but he knows that it is true. After the two day "baptism of fire" he was a completely different man. That pride, arrogance and vanity were gone. The Lord had taken them out of his character, by gift, by virtue of his sincere repentance, and replaced them with humility, kindness and love for his fellow men. There was no doubt about it. Keith was a new creature, by the power of the Holy Ghost, and no small stir was created in the ward because practically everyone noticed the change. The spirit confirmed that he had been born again. He had been CHANGED BY THE LORD from his fallen state to a state of righteousness and given a very special gift, the gift of LOVE. Just like Enos, he now carried with him this great desire for the "welfare of his brethren." (Enos 9)

THE APPLICATION

Let's not get any false notions from the above. Remember that we are talking about the Lord's part in repentance. You may have worked on your personality and your character in a sincere attempt to improve both and you may be able to testify to a measure of success, but the MIGHTY CHANGE is the Lord's department. Let us consider the Lord's instructions to Oliver Cowdery.

Yea, behold, I will tell you in your mind and in your heart, by the Holy Ghost, which shall come upon you and which shall dwell in your heart.

Now, behold, this is the spirit of revelation; behold, this is the spirit by which Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea on dry ground.

Therefore, THIS IS THY GIFT: APPLY UNTO IT, and blessed art thou, for it shall deliver you out of the hands of your enemies, when, if it were not so, they would slay you and bring your soul to destruction. (D&C 8:2-4)

The Lord gave Oliver the spirit of revelation by gift, but Oliver was reminded of his part in using the gift. He had to make application for it. And how did he do that? The same way that we make application for the MIGHTY CHANGE. At the risk of too much repetition –

we FAST and PRAY,

we KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS, and

we CONFESS OUR SINS TO THE LORD

HAVE YOU PUT IN YOUR APPLICATION?

< Chapter 10 (<http://mightychangeofheart.com/etmc/chapter-10/>) Chapter 12 >
(<http://mightychangeofheart.com/etmc/chapter-12/>)

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