

A Mighty Change of Heart (<http://mightychangeofheart.com>)

"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

Chapter 21 – Mercy, Justice And Judgment

CHAPTER 21

MERCY, JUSTICE AND JUDGMENT

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, NEITHER ARE YOUR WAYS MY WAYS, saith the Lord.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so ARE MY WAYS HIGHER THAN YOUR WAYS, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8, 9)

Let us use an analogy. Suppose that we assign a task to one of our children. The task is to be completed before we return. When we return we discover that the task has not been completed. It then comes within our right as a parent to administer justice. The child may not like the justice that we administer but that doesn't matter. The child may realize that he is in a difficult situation and so he jumps up and gets moving. When this happens we usually extend mercy. The Lord operates on much the same principle. He extends mercy to the repentant. He extends total justice to the unrepentant. But the sins and mistakes of the repentant must be paid for by someone. That Someone is the Lord Jesus Christ. His atonement covers the repentant. It does not cover the unrepentant except to grant a resurrection which is a free gift to all regardless of conduct. Amulek testified in this manner:

And thus he shall bring salvation to all those who shall believe on his name; this being the intent of this last sacrifice, to bring about the bowels of MERCY, WHICH OVERPOWERETH JUSTICE, and bringeth about means unto men that they may have faith unto repentance.

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: therefore only unto him that has faith unto repentance is brought about the great and eternal plan of redemption.

Therefore may God grant unto you, my brethren, that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance that ye begin to call upon his holy name, that he would have MERCY upon you;

Yea, cry unto him for MERCY. (Alma 34:15-18)

Isaiah said it this way:

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have MERCY upon him; and to our God, for he will ABUNDANTLY PARDON. (Isaiah 55:7)

If we choose to exercise faith unto repentance then mercy comes into play. Mercy actually can overpower justice. The opposite is true also. Justice can overpower mercy if we do not repent. Then we are exposed to the full effects of the law. This was made very plain to Martin Harris, and the principle applies to all. In that revelation the Lord said:

And surely every man must repent or SUFFER, for I, God am endless...

Therefore I command you to repent — repent, lest I SMITE you by the rod of my mouth, and by my WRATH, and by my ANGER, and your SUFFERINGS BE SORE — how sore you know not, how EXQUISITE YOU KNOW NOT, YEA, HOW HARD TO BEAR YOU KNOW NOT.

For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that THEY MIGHT NOT SUFFER IF THEY WOULD REPENT: But if they would not repent they MUST SUFFER even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit and would that I might not drink the bitter cup and shrink—Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men.

Wherefore, I command you again to repent, lest I HUMBLE YOU WITH MY ALMIGHTY POWER; and that you confess your sins, lest you SUFFER these punishments of which I have spoken, of which in the smallest, yea, even in the least degree you have tasted at the time I withdrew my Spirit.... And MISERY thou shalt receive if thou wilt slight these counsels, yea, even the DESTRUCTION OF THYSELF AND PROPERTY. (D&C 19:4, 15-20, 33)

There is a vast amount of difference between the judgment of man and God. God's judgment is just. It is perfect. It is infallible. Man's judgment may be just, and it may not. It may vary from almost total justice to total injustice with any number of infinite gradations in between.

One day the Master was accused of violating the sabbath by healing someone. He spoke to His accusers and said:

Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgement. (John 7:24)

On another occasion the Lord was teaching in the temple.

And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act.

Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?

This they said tempting him, that they might have to accuse him.

But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.

And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?

She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (John 8:3-10)

Although the Lord's judgment in this case played havoc with the law of Moses, we see the Lord's compassion and mercy carried out. Where did such wisdom come from? How could the Lord demonstrate such judgment? In the same chapter He gave us the clue.

Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I DO NOTHING OF MYSELF: but as MY FATHER HATH TAUGHT ME, I SPEAK THESE THINGS. (John 8:28)

Apparently the Lord didn't make the judgment. The judgment apparently came from the Father through a process of revelation. Is it any wonder that He was perfect? If this is the principle upon which the Master operated, can we operate on a better one?

Now that the Master has been resurrected and received His celestial glory, judgment has been given into His hands. However, He has at various times commissioned people on the earth with that responsibility, but with a string attached. You see, judgment in the Lord's kingdom must be perfect. How do we administer it perfectly? Very simply. The same way in which the Lord administered it. To the Nephite twelve He said:

And know ye that ye shall be judges of this people, ACCORDING TO THE JUDGMENT WHICH I SHALL GIVE UNTO YOU, which shall be JUST. Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, EVEN AS I AM. (III Nephi 27:27)

Did you see the string attached? The twelve were to be judges, but they had to get the judgment from the Lord the same as He had to get it from the Father when He was in the flesh.

The next question that arises is who is to be judged? The Lord answered that question to the Prophet Joseph:

And him that REPENTETH NOT of his sins, and CONFESSETH THEM NOT, ye shall BRING BEFORE THE CHURCH, and do with him as the scripture saith unto you, either by COMMANDMENT or by REVELATION.

And this ye shall do that God may be glorified not because ye forgive not, having not compassion, but that ye may be justified in the eyes of the law, that ye may not offend him who is your lawgiver— (D&C 64:12,13)

But what of a repentant sinner who comes before the church? Alma was given instructions on that subject. The Lord said to him,

Therefore I say unto you, Go; and WHOSOEVER TRANSGRESSETH AGAINST ME, him shall ye judge according to the sins which he has committed: and IF

HE CONFESS HIS SINS BEFORE THEE

AND ME

AND REPENTETH IN THE SINCERITY OF HIS HEART,

HIM SHALL YE FORGIVE,

and I WILL FORGIVE HIM ALSO. (Mosiah 26:29)

Surely the above repentance could only be discerned through the Spirit of the Lord. Perhaps these requirements must be met more than once in a person's life for the Lord added:

Yea, and as OFTEN AS MY PEOPLE REPENT will I forgive them their trespasses against me.
(Mosiah 26:30)

As for the unrepentant, the Lord concluded:

Go, and whosoever will not repent of his sins the same shall NOT BE NUMBERED AMONG MY PEOPLE; and this shall be observed from this time forward. (Mosiah 26:32)

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