

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 5 – Righteousness

PART II

The change in its many aspects and the elements of the process one must undergo to receive or experience this extraordinary change.

CHAPTER 5

RIGHTEOUSNESS

“And blessed are all they who do HUNGER and THIRST after RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED with the HOLY GHOST.”

Righteousness should be the primary goal of every Latter-Day Saint. What does it mean to hunger and thirst after righteousness? This seems to imply an intense desire. The Lord instructed Joseph Smith, Sr.:

Therefore, IF ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work. D&C 4:3

Wanting to serve God apparently is necessary in order to be called to the work. And the Lord said that a person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is blessed.

There is another dimension that intensifies desire. That dimension is fasting. Is not fasting HUNGERING and THIRSTING? What is the primary purpose of fasting? TO BECOME RIGHTEOUS. This is necessary in order to be an influence for good in the lives of others. In other words, a person must set his own life in order so that he can influence others for good. The Savior wanted Peter to understand this principle when He instructed:

When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. Luke 22:32

Peter had to change his own life, and be endowed with power from on high, before he could have any REAL effect in the lives of others. On the day of Pentecost, the power of the Holy Ghost was received. (Acts 2:4) Peter was changed; he was converted. He was now qualified to strengthen his brethren.

Righteousness seems to be connected to serving God. How often do we do something and not feel quite right about the outcome? It just didn't go as expected. Something seems to go wrong. If we could learn to analyze our conduct perhaps righteousness would be easier to obtain. If we can discover the facets of righteousness

we will be able to improve our behavior. Of what does righteousness really consist?

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS FORMULA

OBEDIENCE + PROPER ATTITUDE + PURE MOTIVE = RIGHTEOUSNESS

Remember that our goal is personal righteousness. In order to obtain it we must learn to be obedient, develop a proper attitude and purify our motives.

OBEDIENCE

Obedience has been referred to as the first law of Heaven. Paul tells us that even the Savior had to learn this principle:

Though he were a Son, yet LEARNED HE OBEDIENCE by the things which he suffered;

And being made perfect became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that OBEY him. Hebrews 5:8,9

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven but he that DOETH THE WILL OF MY FATHER, who is in heaven. (III Nephi 14:21)

And to us in our day:

I, the Lord am bound when ye DO WHAT I SAY; but when ye do not what I say ye have no promise. (D&C 82:10)

From the above quotations it is apparent that the Lord expects obedience, but it is one thing to be obedient voluntarily and another to be intimidated to obedience. The Lord wishes voluntary obedience. He wants us to serve Him because we want to, not because He or someone else wants us to. It must be our desire. This leads us to the second facet of righteousness – PROPER ATTITUDE. From the above quotations it is apparent that the Lord expects obedience, but it is one thing to be obedient voluntarily and another to be intimidated to obedience. The Lord wishes voluntary obedience. He wants us to serve Him because we want to, not because He or someone else wants us to. It must be our desire.

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Let's examine some of the possibilities.

PURE MOTIVE (right reason) IMPURE MOTIVE (wrong reason)

Why do I attend church?

To worship God. It makes me feel important. Develop my ability to better Develop business contacts. Serve God. (Priestcraft) My spouse wants me to.

Why do I pay tithing?

I want to help build up the kingdom of God to show the Bishop how successful **I am**. It is necessary to become a leader and that's what I want. To be with the "in" group in the ward or church.

Why do I read the scriptures?

It's the key to serving others. To show how brilliant I am. To understand the Lords viewpoint. To put so and so down.

Motives are difficult to evaluate. It is absolutely impossible to evaluate them in others, unless they tell us or through the power of discernment the Lord makes it known to us because the motive is hidden in the mind. Sometimes it is even difficult to examine our own motives because of our perfecting the art of rationalization. Sometimes we have more than one motive. This complicates the picture as well. It is possible to attend church to worship God AND develop business contacts. It is possible to attend tithing settlement to square your account with God AND to boast to the Bishop about your earning power. It is possible to read the scriptures to learn the Lord's teachings AND to demonstrate how brilliant you are. It is possible to accept a speaking assignment to preach the gospel AND to advertise your business from the pulpit. It is possible for the Aaronic Priesthood to attend their meetings to learn AND to get a Duty to God Award and the public praise. It is possible to want to learn about scouting AND want the praise that goes with the Eagle Badge. It is possible to attend church to worship God AND to show off a brand new outfit and to see how many compliments it will bring.

PRIESTHOOD OR PRIESTCRAFT

The motive is so important that if it is impure, priesthood can go through an instant metamorphosis and become priestcraft. That is a very serious crime in the sight of our Heavenly Father. Nephi warned about our motives in this area, as follows:

He commandeth that there shall be no PRIESTCRAFTS; for, behold, priestcrafts are that men PREACH and SET THEMSELVES up for a light unto the world, THAT THEY MIGHT GET GAIN AND PRAISE of the world; but THEY SEEK NOT the welfare of Zion. ...

But the laborer in Zion shall LABOR FOR ZION; for if THEY LABOR FOR MONEY they shall perish. (II Nephi 26:29,31)

We will now return to the scene of the greatest sermon ever recorded and see what the Lord Himself says about motives. We are standing on the outer fringes of the crowd. Listen, the Savior is speaking.

Take heed that ye do not your ALMS BEFORE MEN, TO BE SEEN OF THEM: OTHERWISE YE HAVE NO REWARD OF YOUR FATHER which is in heaven. Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that THEY MAY HAVE GLORY OF MEN. Verily I say unto you, THEY HAVE THEIR REWARD. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou PRAYEST thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, THAT THEY MAY BE SEEN OF MEN. Verily I say unto you, THEY HAVE THEIR REWARD. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy

Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly Moreover, when ye FAST, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, THAT THEY MAY APPEAR UNTO MEN TO FAST. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. (Matt 6:1-6, 16-18)

Here the Master calls attention to the impure motives used for giving alms, for praying and for fasting. Were the ones doing this being obedient? Yes. Perhaps their attitudes were good also. But what of their motives? They were fasting, praying and giving alms TO BE SEEN OF MEN. They wanted to appear righteous to their friends. They wanted everyone to know how faithful they were in the observance of the law. In short, they wanted the honor and glory. But who gets the honor and glory? How often we forget, Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matt 5:16) With these three facets in the diadem of righteousness we are now prepared to analyze our every act. Am I being obedient? Is my attitude proper? Are my motives pure? Can we answer yes to all three questions in any given situation? If we can, we are on the right course. If we can't, then we need to alter our course. Let us now look forward to the great promise, "...for they shall be filled with the Holy Ghost." (III Nephi 12:6) We have briefly examined three of the facets of righteousness. Each one of the three facets deal with what we do. Through the exercise of free agency we can choose to be OBEDIENT. We can choose to develop a PROPER ATTITUDE. We can choose a PROPER MOTIVE for every act. At this point we are still severely handicapped. We are subject to lack of ability, skill, talent, or training. Our personality may be deficient. In short, we have reached the point that Isaiah so aptly described when he recorded as follows:

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our RIGHTEOUSNESSES are as FILTHY RAGS. (Isaiah 64:6)

POWER OF GOD

Don't get discouraged. You see, we have discussed what we accomplish in righteousness. That is the part we do. It is OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. There is another kind of righteousness, GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS. Up until now we only have the skeleton of righteousness. That skeleton has to have flesh, muscle, sinew and spirit to give it life. That job is too big for us but it isn't too big for our Heavenly Father. He can endow the skeleton of righteousness (what we do) with HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS (what He does) and make it live. At this point we will add to the formula. Do you remember?

Obedience + Proper Attitude + Pure Motive + Power of God = Righteousness

Listen as the Savior instructs the Nephite twelve:

But seek ye first the kingdom of God and HIS (GOD'S) RIGHTEOUSNESS, and all these things shall be added unto you. (III Nephi 13:33)

The Lord made it plain that it was the righteousness of God that was the important factor. Peter must have understood it well. Do you remember when Peter and John went up into the temple at the hour of prayer?

And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but SUCH AS I HAVE GIVE I THEE; IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH RISE UP AND WALK.

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up; and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. (Acts 3:2-9)

The stir that this miracle caused was no small one. The people that saw that hopeless case walking, leaping and praising God were filled with wonder and amazement. A crowd gathered. Peter used it as an opportunity to preach a powerful sermon. He said:

Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by OUR OWN POWER OR HOLINESS we had made this man walk? (Acts 3:12)

Then Peter chastised them for the part they played in the crucifixion of the Savior. Then he testified:

And his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is BY HIM hath GIVEN HIM this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. (Acts 3:16)

Then Peter went on to invite them all to repent and be converted. Peter is now a convert. He has just demonstrated that he could now strengthen the brethren. Remember this is the same Peter that had faltered when attempting to walk on the water. It was the same Peter that had denied knowing the Master on the night of the betrayal. It was the same Peter that had cut off the ear of Malchus. Almost everything that Peter did prior to his conversion seemed wrong. But Peter is no longer JUST PETER. He has been changed by the Power of God through the experience of conversion. With the Power of God he would go and do the Lord's work, the Lord's way with the LORD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS. And so it is with every servant of God. It is the Power of God, through the Holy Spirit, that transforms the filthy rags of our righteousness to the shining robes of HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

A WORD OF CAUTION

If there is anything that Satan likes to do, it is to turn things upside down or get them out of proper sequence. Remember that we are hungering and thirsting after righteousness. This is the primary objective. Is there a plausible substitute with which Satan can get us sidetracked? Yes. What is it then? Truth, yes, truth. Are we not rushing about all over the land in a mad search for truth? Is this not the purpose of our educational institutions? But what of righteousness? You don't get a diploma for that, do you? Somehow it seems to have lost its importance. One of the functions of the Holy Ghost is to teach. He always teaches the truth and He gives it to us primarily because of righteousness. Once in a while He will chastize for unrighteousness, however, pure knowledge is a byproduct of righteousness. Hunger and thirst after righteousness and truth will come in its proper order. The Savior expressed it this way: *Then, said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, IF YE CONTINUE IN MY WORD, then are ye my disciples indeed; and YE SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE. (John 8:31,32)*

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