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**Title** Sealings and Mercies: Moroni's Final Exhortations in Moroni 10

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**Abstract** This is not an essay in the usual sense. Instead, it is a close reading of Moroni 10, looking verse by verse at what Moroni might be teaching us. The overarching question is, to what does Moroni exhort us as he seals his book and writes his final words? Examining each of Moroni's eight exhortations, Faulconer shows one way to study scriptures and perhaps to think about them afresh. In addition to the important admonition to pray about the truth of the Book of Mormon, he sees in this chapter a message of God's mercy and of our need for charity.



# SEALINGS AND MERCIES: Moroni's Final Exhortations in Moroni 10

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JAMES E. FAULCONER

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*James E. Faulconer gave the Book of Mormon Lecture sponsored by the Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies on 15 January 2013 in the Assembly Hall of the Gordon B. Hinckley Center on the BYU campus.*

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This is not a conventional essay. It is, instead, a reading of Moroni's final message, meaning that I paid close attention to as many details as I could without having in mind what I would or would not find. I tried to allow whatever thesis or theses Moroni might have envisioned to come out as I read and thought about what I read.

Of course, reading this chapter again on another occasion, I might see things that I did not see this time. And, of course, I saw things that for one reason or another I decided against including in this essay, but I might later decide that I ought to include them in trying to understand what Moroni wrote. Or Moroni's emphases might seem different on another reading than they did when I worked through his final message. Surely readers of this essay will see things that I have overlooked, and I hope I will point out a few things that some readers have not yet noticed. Sometimes I am likely to ask a question for which I have no answer, not even a speculative one. Often I will offer an idea on how to understand what Moroni says, but when I do I try to leave open whether my idea is the best understanding. And presumably his message has a unity, but rather than prejudice what that unity is, I have tried to read

carefully and see what unity shows itself when we pay attention to the details of the chapter (though, of course, the title of my essay already says something about at least one kind of unity that I found).

The important thing about reading this way is not that I create a completely accurate "translation" of Moroni's chapter into our concepts, nor is it that I decide what one or two or three things Moroni meant. The important thing is trying to hear Moroni speaking from the dust as he seals the record of the Book of Mormon. I am not trying to re-create what was going on in his mind. Instead, I am trying to allow the truth of his words to come out. Sometimes that truth has been obscured for us by old-fashioned language or grammar. That is especially true in the Bible, though it can also happen in modern scripture. Sometimes the truth is obscured by what we think we already know about the text, standard interpretations that may or may not be the best. That often happens when we are familiar with a text and have heard it interpreted often, as for most of us is the case with the Book of Mormon. It is easy to fall into the habit of thinking that we are reading when we are really just repeating to ourselves what we supposedly already know.

*Moroni Son of Mormon, © Steve Nethercott. Used by permission from the artist.*

## FROM THE EDITOR:

As the 2012–13 Laura F. Willes Center for Book of Mormon Studies lecturer, Professor James Faulconer once again impressed an audience with his perceptiveness and sophistication. Through his close reading of the text of Moroni 10 he was able to tease out connections and insights that many of us may have missed. What a delight it is to be instructed by a seasoned, faithful scholar!

Allowing the truth of Moroni's words to show itself means, first of all, putting into question whatever we currently believe Moroni's chapter says. That doesn't require believing that we are wrong. It just means believing that we might be, that there might be things we haven't seen or things we've misunderstood. It means allowing what we read to surprise us, to say things that we hadn't expected.

In turn, that means listening actively to what we find in Moroni's writing, and listening actively means allowing questions to arise from our reading, questions for us to think about. These are questions that we don't bring to the text, but that come to us as we read. We could say that these are questions that the text asks us to think about.

There are a lot of such questions, and most of them come from paying attention to the details of the text since doing that will help us avoid falling back immediately on the interpretations of Moroni's writing that we've learned to attribute to the chapter and now do so out of habit. Some such questions are: Has Moroni arranged his words in an unusual way? If so, why? Does he use words with meanings that we might not expect? What might we learn from such meanings? How do the parts of what he says relate to each other? For example, does he use parallelism (or other rhetorical structures), and if he does, what do those structures suggest to us? How does Moroni relate himself to his audiences? Who are those audiences? How does what he says connect to what other prophets have said, before or after him? Does he use language that makes implicit connections to other scriptures, particularly earlier passages from the Book of Mormon? Do these connections to the prophets and other scriptures shed light on what we find in Moroni 10?

The first thing I noticed is that the word *exhort* occurs over and over in this chapter in one form or another. Because of that repetition, my reading focuses on the eight exhortations of this chapter—six to the Lamanites (vv. 3, 4, 7, 8, 18, 19) and two to the ends of the earth (vv. 27, 30). As I did that reading, I tried to keep in mind what these exhortations have to do with the fact that Moroni is sealing up his book *and* sealing his testimony by the things that he teaches here. What Moroni says in this chapter puts the seal on the entire content of the Book of Mormon, and it gives us implicit directions for how we should approach the rest of the book.

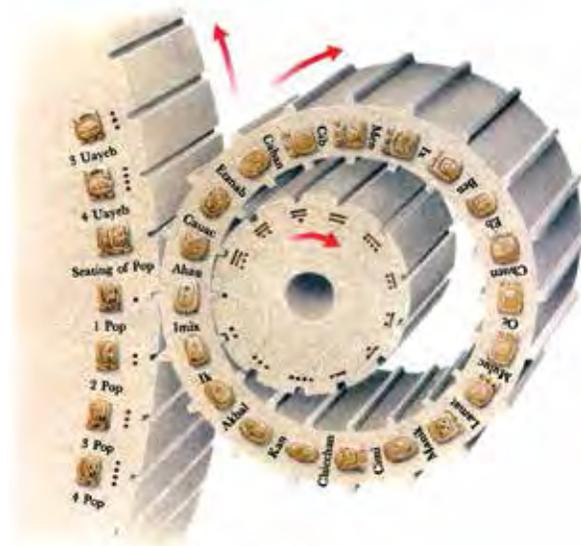
In order to keep this essay at a reasonable length, I will deal in depth with the longer message to the Lamanites but gloss over the message to the ends of the earth.

## Verses 1–2

Now I, Moroni, write somewhat as seemeth me good; and I write unto my brethren, the Lamanites; and I would that they should know that more than four hundred and twenty years have passed away since the sign was given of the coming of Christ. And I seal up these records, after I have spoken a few words by way of exhortation unto you.<sup>1</sup>

Our first pericope (a term that means “a passage that forms a meaningful whole”) is verses 1 and 2. Here Moroni begins the Book of Mormon's final chapter by writing “somewhat as seemeth me good.” It's almost as if he says, “Let me jot down a few things.” Though most of the chapter is obviously the result of deep consideration, the first things that Moroni says have a more informal quality: “I am writing to my brethren, the Lamanites” and “I want them to know that more than 420 years have passed away since the sign of the coming of Christ.” (Is he perhaps counting in a base-20 system, as we find in Maya calendars?)

It is surprising that someone would write a letter to those who have destroyed his people—to his



This modern schematic drawing of the Maya calendar represents the intersecting cycles of the 260-day count on the right and the 365-day cycle on the left. From Jeremy A. Sabloff, *New Archaeology and the Ancient Maya*. Used by permission.

enemies who want to kill him too—and amazing that the letter is one of counsel rather than complaint or demand for vengeance. Moroni’s relation to his enemies is unusual, even for a prophet. We ought to wonder at his charity, but that charity is a model for what we should imitate in our own lives. It isn’t easy to do that. Anyone who has been humiliated or seriously hurt by another knows how difficult is forgiveness, the love that imitates Christ’s redeeming love. It may be that, except for Jesus Christ, we have no better model than Moroni. As we will see, Moroni takes that love to be the heart of the gospel.

I found it puzzling that the first thing Moroni says by way of counsel is a reminder of how long it has been since the *sign* of Christ’s coming appeared to the people. Surely it is important for them to know that and also when Christ appeared among their ancestors. Believing that Jesus is the Messiah requires believing that he existed and that he has appeared to human beings. But Moroni doesn’t use Christ’s appearance as his baseline. He uses, instead, the date when the sign appeared. Why?

Samuel the Lamanite prophesied of the sign (Helaman 14:2-4). Five years later that sign appeared (3 Nephi 1:15-18). Nephi<sub>3</sub> tells us that the Nephites—who, we must remind ourselves, were among the ancestors of those people to whom Moroni now refers as Lamanites—began to reckon their time from that date (3 Nephi 2:8). (Or perhaps that note is an editorial comment by Mormon.) Presumably, when Moroni writes this set of exhortations, the Lamanites still reckon time from the sign. So he is dating his letter, but he is also reminding its addressees of the event that gave them their dating system. Even if they deny Christ, they implicitly remember him and the prophets who prophesy of him through their dating system. As we will see, Moroni wants their memory of Christ and his blessings to be more than implicit. But he begins with what is implicit.

Moroni tells us what he is going to do in what remains of his record: he is going to give us a few words “by way of exhortation,” and then he is going to seal up the records. To exhort is to urge strongly, to make an urgent appeal, often including warning and advice. Moroni concludes his work with an urgent appeal, with advice and warnings, to his brothers who are also his enemies—and to the rest of the world.



Funerary priests sealed the golden doors of the second shrine within King Tutankhamun’s tomb with knots of rope running through copper rings. © François Guenet / Art Resource, NY.



Above: An engraved signet was used to stamp an imprint in the clay. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1925 (25.3.269). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Left: Papyri were often folded tightly, tied with string, and sealed with a lump of clay that has been stamped. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund and Edward S. Harkness Gift, 1922 (22.3.18). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

To seal something is, of course, to secure it closed in some way. But the verb *seal* can also mean “confirm.” We know that part of the Book of Mormon remains sealed, but all of it is confirmed by what Moroni says in the following verses—and it can be confirmed to any of its readers. As we read more than once in this chapter, one of our duties is to ask ourselves in what ways Moroni confirms or seals the message of the Book of Mormon.



*The Fountain of Grace*, by the school of Jan van Eyck. Note the golden coins in the waters of grace that flow from under the throne of Jesus. As with many paintings from the time period, not only is grace being shown, but those who reject grace are depicted negatively. Album / Art Resource, NY.

### Verse 3

Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.

We find the first of Moroni's several exhortations in this verse. Here his hope is strong, if tempered somewhat by the reality he has experienced: he says "when ye shall read these things," as if it is certain that they will read them. Then he backs up just a bit, adding "if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them." He seems confident that they will be able to read them at some point, but he doesn't want to appear to try to force the hand of God.

Moroni's first exhortation reaches back to a theme that begins early in the Book of Mormon, in its first chapter to be exact. There Nephi<sub>1</sub> begins his record by telling us about the mercies of the Lord to his family, and he recounts Lehi's praise upon seeing a vision and reading a book revealed in that vision: "O Lord God Almighty! Thy throne is high in the heavens, and thy power, and goodness, and mercy are over all the inhabitants of the earth" (1 Nephi 1:14). Then Nephi<sub>1</sub> concludes what has become the first chapter of the Book of Mormon with this familiar promise: "I, Nephi, will show unto you that the tender mercies of the Lord are over all those whom he hath chosen, because of their faith, to make them mighty even unto the power of deliverance" (1 Nephi 1:20). The Book of Mormon begins with the theme of mercy. It ends with the same theme.

If we think about the overall arc of the Book of Mormon as well as the record of the Jaredites, the promise that Nephi<sub>1</sub> makes may seem strange. One way to read the Book of Mormon, indeed a way to read almost all scripture, is as a record of human failure. Neither the Old Testament nor the Book of Mormon shows God's people ultimately succeeding. Nor does the New Testament give us such a record. To name only a few, scripture tells us of the failure of the Jaredites, the failure of Israel in the wilderness, the failure of David's kingdom, the coming failure of early Christianity, the failure of Alma's mission to the Zoramites, the failure of the Book of Mormon peoples, the failure to build a temple in Jackson County, the failure of the city of Nauvoo, the failure of nineteenth-century Saints to live the law of consecration, and on and on. In spite of that, Nephi<sub>1</sub> tells us that the story of the Book of Mormon is not one of failure, but a story of the tender mercies of the Lord over the faithful. Presumably one could say the same thing about our other scriptures.

Nephi<sub>1</sub> isn't just the little optimist who, finding his room full of horse manure, shouts, "With all this manure, there must be a pony in here somewhere!" He is a realist. Sometimes he is a self-tortured realist, as we see in what we often call the psalm of Nephi (2 Nephi 4:15-35). But Nephi<sub>1</sub> knows from experience that the Lord is merciful to us *in* our failure, merciful to us because, given our impotence, ultimately we cannot but fail if left to ourselves. Realists understand that without God's mercy, failure is the only option. So they depend on God's mercy.

The Book of Mormon is clearly a record of the failure of those who are lights for themselves. But scripture records not only those people's failure. As Nephi<sub>1</sub> reminds us, it also records that from Adam to the present the Lord has been merciful to his children, and we see in his record and the records of those who follow not only failure but also the Lord's mercies. Often those mercies bless individuals or individual families; sometimes they bless a whole people. But when we see what we call the "pride cycle" in the Book of Mormon, or what we might more broadly call the cycle of repentance and dissolution, we ought to remember that the point of recounting those stories is not that we will see how often human beings have failed to live up to the covenant they make with God. Instead, the point is that he does not fail to keep his covenant. The point is for

us to see God's long-suffering mercies for his people.

As we read scripture, do we see those mercies? As we read of those mercies, do we recognize them as a prototype for what happens in our own lives, or do we see instead only our failures? If the latter, then we implicitly use our own will and power as the measure for our lives and deny the mercy of God. Moroni exhorts—urgently appeals to—the Lamanites to stop looking at the world in terms of their own power and their own will, for if they do they will ultimately see only a record of failure and destruction. But if, instead, they see the mercies with which God has blessed their ancestors and them, they will understand their lives in a completely different way. They will see themselves as children of God rather than masters of their own fate. As children of God, they will experience the happiness brought through his mercy.

Presumably the prayers we are to offer will be deepened and strengthened by our thoughtful remembrance. Real prayer requires that we remember the mercies and gifts of God and that we ponder what we have received.

When we read the next couple of verses, we most often focus on the prayer required of us regarding the truth of the Book of Mormon. But notice that Moroni prefaces that exhortation to prayer with an exhortation in this pericope to remember and to ponder. He doesn't just admonish us to pray, he admonishes us to remember, ponder, and then pray.

Presumably the prayers we are to offer will be deepened and strengthened by our thoughtful remembrance. Real prayer requires that we remember the mercies and gifts of God and that we ponder what we have received. Though Moroni doesn't explicitly link the exhortation to remember to his exhortation to pray about the truth of the Book of Mormon, the juxtaposition of the two suggests that our prayers about that truth must be prefaced by our memory of and pondering on God's mercy, to others and to us.

But what does it mean to remember and ponder the mercies of the Lord beginning with Adam and down to our own time? As an analogy, think of

two ways in which we might remember our wedding anniversary dates. One would be to keep it in our calendar and to be able to recite the date when asked, but otherwise to let the day slide by as simply one more mark on the calendar. Another would be not only to remember when our anniversary occurs but to memorialize what happened on that day by what we do when we remember it. We may have different ways of memorializing, but we genuinely remember our anniversaries when we do something that marks the event as a sacred moment in our lives, something that takes us back to that sacred moment to relive it, though now with more knowledge and understanding than we had then. Our memorials now are surely more profound than those when we were first married, and part of that profundity is the consequence of remembering the years that have passed since our wedding day and memorializing those years.

To ponder is to weigh, and to weigh something in ancient times was, first of all, a means of deciding its value. The words *ponder* and *pound* are etymologically related. Pondering an event and its meaning, weighing it in our minds and comparing it to other things as we do so, is inextricably part of memorializing it. Even so, Moroni asks us to memorialize, not just memorize, the things we read about in the Book of Mormon record. He asks us to memorialize them

as we might other important events in our lives and to weigh those things to count their value. One question we might ask ourselves is whether we memorialize the Book of Mormon and how we might do so.

### Verses 4-5

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.

This exhortation is the one with which most Latter-day Saints are probably most familiar. Again Moroni begins with “*when* ye shall receive these things” rather than “*if* ye shall.” He is confidently counting on the fact that his record will be revealed.

In this familiar pericope he gives his second exhortation to the Lamanites (or is it a repetition of his first?), urging them to ask God whether “these things” are true. To what does “these things” refer? The comparable phrase in Hebrew often means “these words,” but even if we can assume that more than one thousand years after the Nephites’ arrival

This page is an excellent example of one of the many fine vignettes from the Book of the Dead of Hunefer (Thebes, Egypt, 19th Dynasty, ca. 1275 BC). The scene reads from left to right. To the left Anubis brings Hunefer into the judgment area. Hunefer’s heart is weighed against a feather, the symbol of truth; being judged righteous, he is led to the presence of Osiris.

© The Trustees of the British Museum / Art Resource, NY.



in the New World they are still using Hebrew to record their sacred history, knowing that doesn't clear up much. What words is Moroni referring to? We assume that he refers to the Book of Mormon as a whole, and he can profitably be understood to do so. But are there other reasonable interpretations of the phrase as it appears here? Perhaps there are, but the fact that "these things" in verse 3 seems to be parallel to "these records" in verse 2 suggests that Moroni means the Book of Mormon as a whole.

Nevertheless, the parallels between verses 3 and 4 suggest that we should also think about the connection between "these things" and the mercies of God:

Verse 3: When you receive these things, remember God's mercy to human beings from the beginning.

Verse 4: When you receive these things, ask God whether they are true.

This parallel suggests that if we remember that God has been merciful in the past, we can count on him to be merciful now and to tell us whether the record is true. To ask about the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon is to appeal to the mercy of God.

Why is God referred to here as "the Eternal Father" rather than by one of his other titles? My guess is that because Moroni wants the Lamanites to remember the divine mercy that has been given to those who came before and to them, he speaks of God as their Father rather than, for example, their judge.

And they must ask in the name of the Messiah, Christ, the anointed Savior of Israel and of all humankind. Clearly Moroni is not only teaching them how they should pray, he is also underscoring the theme of mercy: the Father is merciful, but they must ask him in the name of the One through whom that mercy comes, namely Jesus the Messiah, who died to bring mercy to us.

Why are the Lamanites told to ask "if these things are *not* true" rather than "if these things are true"? Why not omit the word *not* since the two clauses mean the same thing in English, the language that, for us, is the base language of the book? The difference is rhetorical, but it is an important rhetorical difference. If I say, "Is this true?" I am just asking a question. The person I address can answer either yes or no. But if I say, "Isn't this true?" I am implicitly

assuming the truth of what I ask about when I ask. My addressee can say no, but I am urging him or her to say yes. Moroni is assuming the truth of what he asks them to pray about and urging them toward a particular answer, but he isn't just playing mind games with his readers.

This question of the Book of Mormon's truth is not a scientific question to be approached by first removing myself from as much connection with the outcome as I can, insulating my history and existence from my inquiry. There are important questions to be pursued in that way. The sciences are perhaps the best example of doing that. But not all questions are of that kind. Indeed, because some questions are about my history and existence, about my relation to the question I am asking, about my relationship with the rest of the world, it is impossible to ask them in a scientifically rigorous way. I cannot avoid beginning with some predisposition

The intent of the one praying should not simply be to know the truth of the Book of Mormon. Clearly Moroni urges his readers to want to know that truth. But their ultimate intent, that on which their gaze should be fixed, is salvation, which is why they must have faith in Christ.

toward the outcome if I want to find a truthful answer to the question. Moroni exhorts the Lamanites to begin with the predisposition to accept the truth of what they ask about.

That doesn't mean that those who pray about the Book of Mormon cannot genuinely ask, that their questions are inherently misbegotten and insincere. It only means that they have a stake in the answer and that they cannot avoid that stake. In fact, recognizing that they have a stake in the outcome of their question, those who heed Moroni's exhortation to pray must do so "with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ."

Their heart, which probably means for Moroni, as it did for other people in the ancient world, their whole human being and not, as it does for us, just their emotional being, must be sincere: whole, pure, genuine. And their intent, that on which their gaze is

fixed, must be permanent and immovable. Since the next thing mentioned is faith in Christ, presumably the intent of the one praying should not simply be to know the truth of the Book of Mormon. Clearly Moroni urges his readers to want to know that truth. But their ultimate intent, that on which their gaze should be fixed, is salvation, which is why they must have faith in Christ. The truth of the Book of Mormon may seem irrelevant if we are not concerned about our salvation, and our salvation is impossible if we do not have faith in Christ. So the Lamanites are told to ask God to tell them, in his mercy, whether the record is true, and they must do so with their whole being, with a gaze fixed on salvation and with faith in the mercy of their Savior, Jesus Christ.

Moroni understands the power of the Holy Ghost as the power of divine revelation. Those who pray as they've been exhorted to pray will receive revelation through the Holy Ghost. Obviously, the power to be transformed is directly related to the power of revelation, but the two aren't quite the same thing, and Moroni has the second in mind more than the first.

Moroni's promise is that if they offer that kind of prayer, then God will manifest, in other words reveal, the truth of the record (now "it" rather than "these things"). How will he do so? By the power of the Holy Ghost.

Mormon's thinking is often similar to that of Paul, as we see in Moroni 7:40-48, where Mormon explains charity. We may see parallels here too between Moroni's thinking about the Holy Ghost and Paul's. But there are also differences. For Paul, the power of the Holy Ghost is the divine power to transform people, as he was transformed and as happens in resurrection. But that doesn't seem to be Moroni's meaning. Instead, he appears to be thinking in terms like those of Nephi<sup>1</sup>, who said that Lehi saw things in a vision and spoke by the power of the Holy Ghost, "which power he received by faith on the Son of God . . . [and] which is the gift of God unto all those

who diligently seek him" (1 Nephi 10:17). Moroni understands the power of the Holy Ghost as the power of divine revelation. Those who pray as they've been exhorted to pray will receive revelation through the Holy Ghost. Obviously, the power to be transformed is directly related to the power of revelation, but the two aren't quite the same thing, and Moroni has the second in mind more than the first.

What does it mean to "know the truth of all things"? In context I take it to mean seeing whatever has been revealed.

### Verses 6-7

And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is. And ye may know that he is, by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore I would exhort you that ye deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever.

The third exhortation to the Lamanites occurs in verse 7, but consider first what leads up to that exhortation. It looks like Moroni begins this pericope with a definition of the good: the good is what is just and true. Philosophers like that kind of thing, and this definition fits well with ancient philosophical understandings of the good. But Moroni is no philosopher. He is unlikely to have had any influence whatsoever from Greek thought. Perhaps instead he has in mind Deuteronomy 32:4, which, speaking of God, says, "Just and right [or true] is he." In English, originally both *just* and *true* meant "conforming to an original or a standard." (By coincidence, the Hebrew of Deuteronomy 32:4, *ṣaddiq w yašar*, is similar in root meanings to the root meanings of the English "just and right.") Since God is the ultimate instance of what is good, that which is just and true conforms to him. And, of course, nothing conforming to the Father could deny the Son. In fact, whatever is conformed to the Father must acknowledge and affirm the Son. And how do we come into conformity with the Father? By the power of the Holy Ghost, by the revelation from him who, as a member of the Godhead, is in accord with the Father.

That brings us to the third exhortation: do not deny the power of God. As we will see, this is something that Moroni repeats several times in this chapter, so it is clearly an important part of his



Do we genuinely understand the technologies God has given us as gifts from him, or do we use them as if they were powers in themselves, little gods in our lives that bless us—and command us? Photo by Mark Philbrick.

message. If we deny that power, then we cannot know of Christ; but if we do not deny it, then God's mercy can work in us through our trust (in other words, our faith) in him. Our faith reveals his power.

### Verse 8

And again, I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God. And there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them.

Moroni's fourth exhortation to the Lamanites is closely related to the third. In fact, perhaps they are the same; perhaps "do not deny the power of God" and "do not deny the gifts of God" mean the same. In verse 7 Moroni exhorts the Lamanites not to deny God's power, specifically his power to reveal the Son. In verse 8 he exhorts them not to deny God's gifts, the things he gives us in his mercy. However, since his greatest gift, his Son, is the ultimate manifestation of his mercy, these two exhortations are of a piece. Perhaps that is why Moroni begins this exhortation by saying, "And *again*, I exhort you." He hasn't previously explicitly exhorted them not to

deny the gifts of God, but if we see the connection between denying the power of God and denying his gifts, we can perhaps see how Moroni understands this exhortation to be a repetition of the immediately previous one.

Why does Moroni tell his audience that the gifts "come from the same God"? Are the Lamanites polytheists, attributing some blessings to one god and other blessings to another? Perhaps, but whether or not they are, Moroni seems to be concerned that because there are different ways in which the gifts of God are administered and made manifest, people might be led to believe that they come from different gods.

Do we suffer under that same delusion, not recognizing the ways in which all good things come from God? When we see a tomato in our garden, do we experience it as a gift from God or as something that our industry and the facts of nature have produced so that "gift from God" is merely a metaphor? Do we genuinely understand the technologies we use to be gifts from God, or do we use them as if they were powers in themselves, little gods in our lives that bless us—and command us? My experience is that it is more difficult than it might seem to recognize the gifts of God because I tend almost always to see the things I deal with as the consequences

of natural, social, or scientific processes. Of course they are that. It would be a mistake to think they are not. But if I see them as *only* that, then I am likely to fail to see them as something given to me by my Father in Heaven. In that case, I fail to recognize his mercy and love.

Moroni's reminder that all gifts come from the same God may be as timely for us as it would have been for the people of his time. However, though there is only one God who gives all blessings, there are multiple manifestations of his Spirit. Moroni says that is the case so that we can profit from their variety. I wonder why we need a variety of manifestations of the Spirit in order to profit from those manifestations. Is this like the Lord's statement in Doctrine and Covenants 1 that "these commandments . . . were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D&C 1:24)? Perhaps our weaknesses mean that the Spirit must manifest itself in a variety of ways so that we will notice and understand it according to our ability and experience.

Is "the Spirit of God" in Moroni 10:8 the same as the Holy Ghost, or does it refer to the Spirit of the Father? Since I'm not sure what it means for the *spirit* of the Father to manifest something, unless we are talking about his power and influence, I might assume this refers to the Holy Ghost. But perhaps "Spirit of God" here means something like the Light of Christ. Since verse 8 speaks of God's gifts being given to human beings generally, perhaps that is a better understanding of the phrase.

### Verses 9–17

For behold, to one is given by the Spirit of God, that he may teach the word of wisdom; and to another, that he may teach the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; and to another, exceedingly great faith; and to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; and again, to another, that he may work mighty miracles; and again, to another, that he may prophesy concerning all things; and again, to another, the beholding of angels and ministering spirits; and again, to another, all kinds of tongues; and again, to another, the interpretation of languages and of divers kinds of tongues. And all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man severally, according as he will.

We saw that Moroni's fourth exhortation to his brothers and sisters, the Lamanites, was not to deny God's gifts. Now he lists some of the gifts of the Spirit.

Clearly Moroni's list and that of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:8–11 are similar. In Moroni's version I mark the most important phrases that differ between the two in italics. In addition, Moroni's list omits some significant parts of Paul's text, and those are marked with an ellipsis between square brackets.

For behold, to one is given by the Spirit of God, that he may teach the word of wisdom; and to another, that he may teach the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; and to another, *exceedingly great* faith; and to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; and again, to another, that he may work *mighty* miracles; and again, to another, that he may prophesy *concerning all things*; and again, to another, the *beholding [discerning] of angels and ministering* spirits; and again, to another, [ . . . ] *all kinds* of tongues; and again, to another, the interpretation of *languages and of divers kinds* of tongues. And all these gifts [ . . . ] *come by the Spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man severally, according* as he will.

Most of what is unmarked is identical to or very similar to what we find in 1 Corinthians. There are any number of possible explanations for these similarities between what Paul and Moroni have written, from both authors depending on the same, lost ancient text, to Joseph Smith falling back on familiar wording when he came to translate a passage with ideas similar to those with which he was familiar, to God inspiring both men to say the same things. But I am not interested in pursuing that question, because it takes us away from the more important question of what Moroni teaches in chapter 10. One way to think about that is, I believe, to focus on the differences between Paul's text and Moroni's.

Notice what I take to be the most important difference. In Moroni's version the emphasis at the beginning, an emphasis that I believe carries throughout the passage, is on teaching wisdom rather than on having it. His version of this list shifts the passage's meaning from its focus on the gifts we may be given to the ways in which we can use those gifts to serve others: to teach wisdom and knowledge, to heal, to work miracles and prophesy, to behold or discern spirits, and to interpret the variety of languages. God gives a variety of gifts so

that we may serve one another better, and Moroni's readers ought not to deny those gifts. In serving one another, we become more like our Savior and our Father. God's mercy is to give us what we need so that we, too, can be merciful.

Surely the irony of this message isn't lost on Moroni. As I said earlier, he writes to the descendants of those who have killed his people and would like to kill him, but his message is that they ought to remember the mercy of God and serve one another.

I wonder what we should make of the distinction in verses 9 and 10 between teaching wisdom and teaching knowledge. Of course, this may be merely a pleonastic parallel, Moroni saying the same thing in different words. In that case the words *wisdom* and *knowledge* have the same meaning.

But perhaps there is a difference. Perhaps *wisdom* refers to knowledge that comes from God and *knowledge* refers to a human capability (which, of course, must still be in accord with God). Thomas Aquinas, for example, has made such a distinction, distinguishing between the things we can learn because we have been given the capability of discovering them ourselves and the things we can know only because God has revealed them. The problem with this speculative division, as tempting as it may be, is that I don't find any clear scriptural warrant for it. The fact that verse 9 speaks of what is given "to one" and verse 10 speaks of what is given "to another" is perhaps some warrant, but it is weak. I take it, therefore, that Moroni is using parallelism in verses 9 and 10 rather than making a point about two different things: the Spirit gives some the ability to teach knowledge, or wisdom.

A key point in this series of verses concerning the gifts of the Spirit is the clarification that Moroni gives in verse 17. He has spoken of the Spirit and of the Spirit of God. Both of those are ambiguous. They could refer to the Holy Ghost, or they could refer to the Spirit of the Father, which I again assume means his power and influence. But in verse 17, Moroni makes it clear that he has been talking about the Spirit of Christ: "all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ." Whether that is the same as the Light of Christ, a term that Mormon used and Moroni quoted in Moroni 7:18-19, isn't obvious, but I assume they are the same. One reason to make that assumption is that just as the Light of Christ is available to all people, the gifts given by the Spirit of Christ are

available to all: "they come unto every man severally [individually] according as he [Christ] will."

This, too, marks an important difference between what Paul says and what Moroni says. Whereas, for

Whereas, for Paul, the gifts of the Spirit are given to those who are part of "the body" of the church, Moroni understands them to be available to all human beings. The Lamanites . . . should recognize the gifts of God and ought not to deny them.

Paul, the gifts of the Spirit are given to those who are part of "the body" of the church, Moroni understands them to be available to all human beings. Even if the Lamanites have not yet been converted, they should recognize the gifts of God and ought not to deny them.

#### Verses 18-19

And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that every good gift cometh of Christ. And I would exhort you, my beloved brethren, that ye remember that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and that all these gifts of which I have spoken, which are spiritual, never will be done away, even as long as the world shall stand, only according to the unbelief of the children of men.

The fourth exhortation, not to deny God's gifts, is followed by two admonitions. Moroni exhorts his readers to remember that every good gift comes from Christ and to remember that because he is the same, those gifts will always be with us, unless we do not believe. In the previous pericope, the fourth exhortation, enumerating the gifts of God, ended by telling us that these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ. In these verses, the fifth exhortation repeats that: "every good gift cometh of Christ." Then the sixth exhortation expands that claim, explaining it: Christ is the same forever, so if he gave gifts in the past, he continues to give those gifts today and will do so in the future. And his gifts will never be taken away, except as a consequence of unbelief.

What does it mean, though, to have said that the gifts are given to all people (v. 16) and also that the gifts

may be taken away because of unbelief? If *belief* refers to “belief in the teachings of the only true church,” then there is an implicit contradiction between the two. It cannot be true that the gifts of the Spirit of Christ are given to everyone and that they will be taken from those who do not believe the teachings of the only true church. That contradiction is good evidence for rejecting the interpretation of *belief* as belief in the teachings of the true church. Moroni must have something broader in mind when he says that the gifts may be taken away because of unbelief.

The key is to remember what I hope for: salvation. I trust that the Father, through the merits of his Son, Jesus Christ, will save me, and I hope for that salvation.

In context this appears to refer to belief in Christ, making the claim less restrictive: the gifts are available to all Christians. But the 1978 First Presidency statement that the great religious leaders and philosophers, such as Socrates, received part of God’s light and that all people receive “sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation” suggests by implication that the gifts of the Spirit are also available to non-Christians. What, then, might it mean to say that the gifts may be taken away because of unbelief? Surely there are those who do not have the gifts of the Spirit, and Moroni appears to believe that the Lamanites whom he addresses are among them. How do we deal with this tension between the gifts being given to all and their being taken away because of unbelief?

One solution is to understand the word *unbelief* to mean “disbelief”: those who refuse to believe the light and knowledge that they have been given, whatever that is, may lose the gifts of the Spirit that have been given to them. I find that solution satisfactory but wonder whether there might not be better ways of dealing with the issue.

### Verses 20–22

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 be saved in the kingdom of God if ye have not faith; 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.

Moroni has finished his exhortations to the Lamanites, but those exhortations have further consequences. He makes that apparent when he begins verse 20 with *wherefore*, indicating that what comes afterward is a consequence of what has just been said. It isn’t obvious how to link the word *wherefore* to what came before. Is it saying, “Given what was said in verses 18 and 19, therefore . . .,” or is it saying, “Given everything I’ve said about gifts, therefore . . .”? I think it makes more sense to understand it in the latter sense: Since (1) you can know the truth of all things by the Holy Ghost, and since (2) the Lord gives his many gifts to all in a variety of ways, and since (3) he is the same always, therefore (4) we must have faith; we must trust God. We must continue to trust the Savior, understanding that he can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, that he knows what we do not, and perhaps cannot, know.

But faith without hope is inconceivable. If I trust that the Lord can do what he says he will do, then I also have hope that he will. I look forward with anticipation for the fulfillment of his promises. Not to have that hope is not to trust him, because if I trust him, then I assume that what he says will come about.

Less obvious, however, is the necessity of charity. If I have faith, I must also have hope. As we’ve seen, that is almost a logical tautology. But why is it also true that if I have hope, I must also have charity?

The key is to remember what I hope for: salvation. I trust that the Father, through the merits of his Son, Jesus Christ, will save me, and I hope for that salvation. But it is important to recognize what I hope for: I hope that the mercy and charity of the Father and the Son will make my salvation possible. My salvation, however, means returning to live with the Father in his family. It means becoming like him. And becoming like him means coming to have the same mercy and charity for others that he has for me. It is not *logically* impossible to hope for salvation and yet not have charity towards my brothers and sisters. But it is, in fact, impossible.

Charity provides the test of my faith. In logic there is an argument form, *modus tollens*, that is rec-

ognized as valid. Any argument that has that form is valid: if its assumptions are true, then so is its conclusion. The basic form of the *modus tollens* argument is “if S, then P; not P, so not S.” Examples of this argument make the validity of the form obvious: “If it is raining, then the sidewalks are wet” is true (assuming that we are speaking of ordinary, uncovered sidewalks). So, if the sidewalks are not wet, then it hasn’t been raining.

If we collapse what Moroni has been saying into a brief statement, we can say, “If I have faith, then I have charity.” But by *modus tollens* that means that if I do *not* have charity, then I do not have faith. If I believe the first claim, “if faith, then charity,” then logically I must also believe that if I do not have charity, then I do not have faith. A sure guide to the strength of our faith is our godly love for others. That is why Moroni can say, “Except ye have charity ye can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God” (Moroni 10:21).

Without charity I cannot enter the Father’s kingdom, because I would not be like him. If I do not trust him—have faith—then I cannot enter his kingdom, because I cannot be trusted to do what he asks me to do. Without hope, I cannot foresee the fulfillment of his promises, so I will not trust him. Faith, hope, and charity are equally necessary to salvation.

Perhaps having in mind the situation in which the Lamanites find themselves as he is writing, Moroni adds, “If ye have no hope ye must needs be in despair” (Moroni 10:22). In despair there is no meaningful future; there is no way forward. There is no real hope. But the additional claim that despair comes because of iniquity is not a claim that psychological despair is caused by sin. It is a claim about the human condition, not an accusation against people who are depressed. To live in the world without the hope of the gospel, which is to be in iniquity, is to be in despair. Regardless of how psychologically happy people without the hope of the gospel may be, they live in despair because they live without the hope that life is ultimately meaningful.

For all I know, the famous twentieth-century mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell was a very happy person. Nevertheless, as he testifies in “A Free Man’s Worship,” he lived in despair: “Brief and powerless is Man’s life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter

## STATEMENT OF THE FIRST PRESIDENCY REGARDING GOD’S LOVE FOR ALL MANKIND

Based upon ancient and modern revelation, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gladly teaches and declares the Christian doctrine that all men and women are brothers and sisters, not only by blood relationship from common mortal progenitors but as literal spirit children of an Eternal Father.



Confucius  
(551–479 BC)



Plato  
(427–347 BC)



Martin Luther  
(1483–1546)



John Calvin  
(1509–1564)

The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God’s light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.

The Hebrew prophets prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, who should provide salvation for all mankind who believe in the gospel.

Consistent with these truths, we believe that God has given and will give to all peoples sufficient knowledge to help them on their way to eternal salvation, either in this life or in the life to come.

We also declare that the gospel of Jesus Christ, restored to His Church in our day, provides the only way to a mortal life of happiness and a fulness of joy forever. For those who have not received this gospel, the opportunity will come to them in the life hereafter if not in this life.

Our message therefore is one of special love and concern for the eternal welfare of all men and women, regardless of religious belief, race, or nationality, knowing that we are truly brothers and sisters because we are sons and daughters of the same Eternal Father.

“God’s Love for All Mankind,” First Presidency Statement from Spencer W. Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, and Marion G. Romney, 15 February 1978.



*Moroni Buries the Plates*, by Clark Kelley Price. Used by permission.

rolls on its relentless way; . . . Man [is] condemned . . . to lose his dearest, [and] to-morrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness.” That is a view of life devoid of faith and hope. It is despair, however psychologically happy Russell may have been.

### Verse 23

And Christ truly said unto our fathers: If ye have faith ye can do all things which are expedient unto me.

With these words Moroni concludes his exhortations to the Lamanites. Seeing their despair, a despair that has resulted in massacre and genocide, he seals his last words to them with an exhortation to faith.

Is what he attributes to Christ an otherwise unrecorded saying of Jesus? It appears to be since it doesn’t occur elsewhere in the Book of Mormon. That Christ said this to “our fathers” tells us that this may not be something that he said to his disciples in the Old World, and we don’t in fact find it in the New Testament. The closest thing to this saying is what Alma says in Alma 32:21, “If ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.” But that is not one of Jesus’s sayings as currently known. So I assume that this is something that the Savior said to the Nephites that is on one of the records that was not included in Mormon and Moroni’s compilation.

As his final message of hope, Moroni has preserved a saying of Jesus: “If you have faith, you can do anything that I need you to do.” This is the

opposite of Russell’s despair, a despair that is gradually enveloping much of the world. Though Moroni finds himself in circumstances that could easily warrant despair and anger, he offers a message of faith and, therefore, also one of hope and charity.

### Verses 24–33

Following the address to the Lamanites, we come to a long passage that I will gloss over, hitting what I think are some of its high points.

Having spoken to the Lamanites, Moroni turns to address “all the ends of the earth” in verse 24, and he repeats key points of his exhortations:

1. A reminder that if the gifts are not present, it is because of unbelief
2. An exhortation to remember “these things,” for what Moroni has written is declared by God to be true
3. An exhortation to come to Christ and lay hold on every good gift

And he concludes with the promise that if the Lamanites come to Christ and allow him to perfect them, then they can be sanctified (Moroni 10:32–33).

Notice how much of this overlaps with what he has said to the Lamanites, which is not surprising. But two points are notable about what Moroni says here. The first is that he *does not* repeat the part of this chapter with which we are most familiar, Moroni 10:4–5, the admonition to ask God whether “these things” are true. Perhaps, however, that is built into his exhortation to remember these things, particularly since we need to remember them *because* God declares them to be true.

The second notable thing is the structure of the three key points listed above. Rhetoricians call that structure *inclusio*, or “inclusion,” where one idea is sandwiched between the same idea or related ideas. Here, of course, since the structure is a general structure that we have deduced from the themes of verses 27–30 rather than from specific words or phrases, most rhetoricians would probably not call this inclusion. In spite of that, seeing that general structure helps us see more clearly what Moroni is doing. He places his exhortation to remember (and, implicitly, to find out through prayer) between his reminders that we should seek the gifts of the Spirit. By doing so, he reminds us that the central message of his

farewell letter is not that we should get a testimony of the Book of Mormon through prayer (though we certainly should). Moroni's message in these verses is that we must seek the gifts that God in his mercy makes available to all people—and those gifts include the knowledge of the Book of Mormon's truth.

### Verses 31–33

And awake, and arise from the dust, O Jerusalem;  
yea, and *put on thy beautiful garments, O daughter of Zion*;  
and strengthen thy stakes and enlarge thy borders forever,  
that thou mayest no more be confounded,  
that the covenants of the Eternal Father which he hath made unto thee, O house of Israel, may be fulfilled.

Yea, *come unto Christ, and be perfected* in him,  
and deny yourselves of all ungodliness;  
and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness,  
and love God with all your might, mind and strength,  
*then is his grace sufficient for you,*  
*that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ*;  
and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ,  
ye can in nowise deny the power of God.  
And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ,  
and deny not his power,  
*then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God,*  
*through the shedding of the blood of Christ,*  
which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot.

In these verses Moroni concludes his exhortations to all the world with a beautiful piece of poetry modeled on Isaiah 52, poetry that repeats the major themes of this concluding chapter: come to Christ as the bride comes to the bridegroom, accepting the gifts that he offers (in other words, the bride-price of his grace); come to Christ and be perfected in his mercy by refusing ungodliness, all that which is not like him; come to Christ and receive salvation and sanctification.

### Verse 34

And now I bid unto all, farewell. I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead. Amen.

Having finished his exhortations, Moroni bids all farewell, sealing his work with an exhibition of the very things he has just written of: trust in God, hope, and charity. He trusts that his death will mean entrance into paradise. In other words, he has faith in the plan of salvation. He hopes for resurrection and for the judgment, which will be pleasing because the mercy of God will have made his repentance possible. He looks forward to God's judgment because he knows that he has been made clean and whole through the atoning sacrifice made by Jesus Christ. Moroni has exhibited charity from the beginning to the end of his final address, lovingly exhorting his mortal enemies to repent and to seek the gifts of God, and counseling even those whom he cannot know to come to Christ. His final testimony is a testimony of God's love for us and the hope that love has given Moroni. Having exhorted his readers to come to Christ and recognize the Lord's gifts and love, Moroni seals his record with his testimony of what that mercy and love means for him. ■



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### NOTE

1. For this and other scriptural extracts, I have adopted the paragraphing from Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 627–30.