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Faith, Hope, and Charity

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As part of his final appeal to his future readers to come unto Christ and be perfected in Him, Moroni testified: “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 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” (Moroni 10:20–21).

Faith, hope, and charity are familiar terms often spoken of together, and nearly always in the same order. Paul indicates that the order has significance, charity being the last and also the greatest of the three (see 1 Corinthians 13:13). A perusal of Church manuals and magazines shows that faith is discussed the most, charity next, and hope the least. In fact, it has been my experience that hope, which is as necessary to our salvation as faith or charity, is rarely discussed as a gospel principle. Furthermore, treatment of faith and charity is often limited to simply reading the words of Paul or Alma or Moroni without a careful analysis of what these apostles and prophets said or what their intended meaning was. To add to our understanding, we will explore some of the teachings of the Book of Mormon concerning faith, hope, and charity—their meanings, their relationships to each other, how they are acquired, and what their fruits are.

Faith

The word *faith* appears some 260 times in the Book of Mormon. Except for perhaps a half dozen instances—such as Alma 32; 48:15–16; 57:26–27 and Ether 12:6—the writers use the word without defining or describing it, apparently assuming that the reader understands its meaning.

The word *faith* is used in several contexts. At least sixteen times it refers to one’s system of belief, the Church, or the gospel, as in “He had hope to shake me from the faith” (Jacob 7:5); “This judge was after the order and faith of Nehor” (Alma 14:16); and “A few of the Lamanites who were converted unto the true faith” (3 Nephi 6:14). At least six references deal with one’s having strong faith. For example, Ammon rejoiced over the Lamanite queen, saying, “Blessed art thou because of thy exceeding faith; I say unto thee, woman, there has not been such great faith among all the people of the Nephites” (Alma 19:10). And concerning the Nephite multitude to whom the Savior appeared after His Resurrection, He told His disciples, “So great faith have I never seen among all the Jews” (3 Nephi 19:35). In at least nineteen instances, the Book of Mormon peoples and the reader are encouraged or charged to acquire or exercise faith. At least twenty-seven times, the word refers to someone’s spiritual status. For instance, the Lamanite converts known as the people of Ammon are described as being “firm in the faith of Christ” (Alma 27:27), and Jarom records, “Our kings and our leaders were mighty men in the faith of the Lord” (Jarom 1:7). These are a few of the contexts in which the word *faith* appears in the Book of Mormon.

The rest of the 260 references to faith testify to the fruits of faith, the great blessings that flow from acquiring, retaining, and exercising it. Faith brings the power of the Holy Ghost to reveal truths, change hearts, remit sins, and sanctify (see Jarom 1:4; Mosiah 4:3; 5:4–7; Alma 9:20; 3 Nephi 27:19). Only through faith can miracles take place (see Ether 12:16, 18). Through faith confining cords are broken (see 1 Nephi 7:11–12; Alma 14:26–28), prison walls tumble (see Ether 12:13), military victories are won (see Alma 57:21–22), mountains move (see Jacob 4:6; Mormon 8:24; Ether 12:30), ancient records come forth (see 2 Nephi 3:19–21; Ether 12:22), and angels manifest themselves (see Moroni 7:30). Exceeding faith allows some to see Christ and have all things revealed to them (see Ether 3:9; 4:7; 12:8, 19–20, 31). Ultimately, the Savior “claimeth all those who have faith in him; and they who have faith in him will cleave unto every good thing” (Moroni 7:28), and He grants them eternal life (see Helaman 8:15). The list goes on and on. We are reminded several times that “the Lord is able to do all things according to his will, for the children of men, if it so be that they exercise faith in him” (1 Nephi 7:12; see also 2 Nephi 1:10; Moroni 10:23). It seems that the inspired writers of the Book of Mormon longed for later readers to understand clearly that the fruits of faith are both precious and possible.

How to Acquire Faith. The Book of Mormon also contains several passages about how one acquires faith. Consider the following in the order they appear.

Alma recorded that the keeping of the law of Moses by certain converted Lamanites served to “strengthen their

faith in Christ” (Alma 25:16). He also taught a group of Zoramites that faith comes and is increased by experimenting with the word of God, by planting the word in one’s heart, then by nourishing it with diligence and patience (see Alma 32–33). When his listeners asked how to do that, Alma admonished them to search the scriptures and cry unto the Lord through prayer, to soften their hearts and to “begin to believe in the Son of God” (Alma 33:22).

Amulek added his plea to those same Zoramites “that ye may begin to exercise your faith unto repentance, that ye begin to call upon his holy name” (Alma 34:17). He also reminded them that such prayer is vain unless it is accompanied by active concern for others (see Alma 34:28–29).

Growing in faith is tied to fasting and praying “oft” (Helaman 3:35). “You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ” (Helaman 5:41). Nephi, the son of Helaman, was similarly told that he would be made mighty in faith because of his unweariness in declaring the gospel, in seeking the Lord’s will instead of his own, and in keeping the commandments (see Helaman 10:4–5).

The Lamanite prophet Samuel reminded the Nephites that coming to a knowledge of the truth and to a belief in the holy scriptures leads to faith (see Helaman 15:7). Mormon testified that “the Lord God prepareth the way that the residue of men may have faith in Christ” by sending angels to minister unto the children of men, by declaring by His own mouth to prophets that Christ should come, by manifesting things in diverse ways unto the children of men, and by sending angels to declare “the word of Christ unto the chosen vessels of the Lord, that they may bear testimony of him” (Moroni 7:21–25, 28–32).

It seems clear from these verses that faith is a gift bestowed by God, and that a person can, and indeed must, qualify himself or herself to receive that gift by learning of Christ through studying the scriptures and listening to the prophets; by offering honest, humble, and persistent prayers; by patiently obeying the commandments he or she has been given; and by fasting. Gaining faith is assured with such an approach.

Defining Faith. Undoubtedly it is much more important to know how to acquire faith and experience its fruits than to be able to give a technical definition of it. However, many minds ache to understand clearly and to be able to explain principles precisely. What help, then, does the Book of Mormon give us in defining faith?

Alma 32 contains pertinent information. Three times Alma tells us what faith is not. He says, “Faith is not to have a perfect knowledge,” for “if a man knoweth a thing he hath no cause to believe, for he knoweth it” (Alma 32:21, 18; see also 32:17, 26). As both evidence and explanation of this notion, Alma gives the example of planting a seed and observing it sprout. When a person has actually experienced the sprouting, Alma says his knowledge is perfect and his faith is dormant in that thing (see Alma 32:34). The phrase “in that thing” is an important key, for Alma is quick to remind us that our knowledge is not perfect in *all* things, but only in *that thing*, that is, that the seed is good. He adds, “Neither must ye lay aside your faith, for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed that ye might try the experiment to know if the seed was good” (Alma 32:36).

This explanation helps us better understand Ether 3:19, which says that after the brother of Jared saw the finger of the Lord, “he had faith no longer, for he knew, nothing doubting.” This does not mean that he no longer had need for faith and that he knew all things, but he did know specifically that Christ lived and had a spirit body. “In that thing” his knowledge was perfect and his faith dormant. However, he still needed to have faith concerning a myriad of other things he had not yet seen or experienced. Hence, whatever else it is, faith includes an element of anticipation of unseen reality. It is oriented toward the future.

What other elements does faith possess besides anticipation? The following three passages about the two thousand stripling warriors are illuminating. First, after explaining that the Nephites were taught to defend themselves but never to be aggressors, the record states:

“And this was their faith, that by so doing God would prosper them in the land, or in other words, if they were faithful in keeping the commandments of God that he would prosper them in the land; yea, warn them to flee, or to prepare for war, according to their danger;

“And also, that God would make it known unto them whither they should go to defend themselves against their enemies, and by so doing, the Lord would deliver them; and this was the faith of Moroni” (Alma 48:15–16).

Then, concerning the fact that all survived a vicious battle, Helaman explains:

“And now, their preservation was astonishing to our whole army, yea, that they should be spared while there was a thousand of our brethren who were slain. And we do justly ascribe it to the miraculous power of God, because of their exceeding faith in that which they had been taught to believe—that there was a just God, and whosoever did not doubt, that they should be preserved by his marvelous power.

“Now this was the faith of these of whom I have spoken; they are young, and their minds are firm, and they do put their trust in God continually” (Alma 57:26–27).

Finally, in response to fervent prayers for strength against their enemies, the righteous Nephites received this welcome answer:

“Yea, it came to pass that the Lord our God did visit us with assurances that he would deliver us; yea, insomuch that he did speak peace to our souls, and did grant unto us great faith, and did cause us that we should hope for our deliverance in him” (Alma 58:11).

The sense of the word *faith* in these instances is that of assurance, trust, lack of doubt, and confidence. Also, in every instance, doing or a sense of obeying is present. “And thus they went forth” (Alma 48:20); “and they did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness” (Alma 57:21); “and we did take courage . . . and were fixed with a determination. . . . And thus we did go forth with all our might” (Alma 58:12–13). Thus the Book of Mormon teaches that faith is an assurance, confidence, and trust in unseen reality that impels one to act.

What of Alma 32:21, which says, “If ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true”? Is this not a definition of faith? I suggest that it is more a statement of what follows faith than it is a definition of faith. If we define *faith* solely with the word *hope*, then they are the same. But it is clear from many other passages in the Book of Mormon that hope is something different from, even beyond, faith. If one views Alma 32:21 as a statement that hope follows faith, then that view is consistent with other passages that treat hope as distinct from faith.

Hope

The word *hope* is used fifty times in the Book of Mormon. It is used in two senses: (1) a general one, consistent with common usage and meaning a “desire accompanied by expectation of fulfillment,” or wanting or longing for something that may be a possibility, or a kind of wishing and wondering; and (2) a specific, theological sense, meaning a state of mind, heart, and spirit necessary for salvation, a gift of God given through the Holy Ghost.

Some examples of the general use of the word *hope* are found in Jacob and 3 Nephi. Jacob said that Sherem “had hope to shake me from the faith” (Jacob 7:5), and Giddianhi wrote to Lachoneus, “I hope that ye will deliver up your lands and your possessions, without the shedding of blood” (3 Nephi 3:10). Likewise, by gathering into one body and having provisions for seven years, the Nephites “did hope to destroy the robbers from off the face of the land” (3 Nephi 4:4).

These examples speak of a different hope from the second type: that which one must have in order to be saved (see Moroni 10:21), the hope that “cometh of faith, [and] maketh an anchor to the souls of men,” making them “sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works” (Ether 12:4).

What does the Book of Mormon say about this saving hope? Saving hope follows, comes from, and grows out of faith, as Moroni states:

“Whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope *cometh of faith*” (Ether 12:4; emphasis added).

“Wherefore, ye may also have hope, and be partakers of the gift, if ye will but have faith” (Ether 12:9).

“And again, my beloved brethren, I would speak unto you concerning hope. How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall have hope?

“And what is it that ye shall hope for? Behold I say unto you that ye shall have hope through the atonement of Christ and the power of his resurrection, to be raised unto life eternal, and this because of your faith in him according to the promise.

“Wherefore, if a man have faith he must needs have hope; for without faith there cannot be any hope” (Moroni 7:40–42).

A casual reading of these verses can lead to some confusion, however. Does Moroni 7:40 say that one must have hope before faith? What, then, does verse 42 mean, which states that without faith there cannot be any hope? The intended meaning, I submit, is that if one exercises faith, hope must follow, which hope is the sure and natural consequence of faith. The sense of verse 40 would then be, “How is it that ye can attain unto faith, save ye shall *then* [naturally, automatically, as an outgrowth and reward of your faith] have hope?” If one takes such a view, Moroni 7:40–42 is consistent internally and also with other Book of Mormon passages that speak of the sequential relationship of faith and hope.

Others have taken a somewhat different view. They speak of faith and hope as having reciprocal relationships at various levels. Applying such an understanding to Moroni 7:40–42 would suggest that verse 40 refers to one level of hope, which leads to faith, which in turn leads to a second level of hope noted in verses 41 and 42. This pattern then repeats itself in an upward cycle. A careful examination of the scriptural record, however, shows reasons in favor of the idea that saving hope is a result, not an initial cause, of faith.

Taking the sequential view that faith precedes hope does not deny that something must precede faith. If it is not

hope, what is it? Alma called it a “desire to believe” (Alma 32:27). Perhaps this could be thought of as a type of hope, relating to a general “wishing and wondering.” But it is not the saving hope that I believe Mormon and Moroni refer to in Moroni 7:40–42. Saving hope *follows* faith.

In addition to teaching that saving hope comes as a result of faith, the Book of Mormon supports the idea that saving hope is a desire, a longing, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness with a full expectation of eventual fulfillment. Consider the following. The prophet Ether explained that hope “maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify god” (Ether 12:4), and the Lamanite prophet Samuel taught that those who experience a change of heart “are firm and steadfast in the faith” (Helaman 15:7–8).

If hope makes men steadfast, and those who have experienced a change of heart are steadfast, can we not then link hope with a change of heart? It is interesting to examine the Book of Mormon references to a convert’s change of heart in relation to the idea that hope consists of a desire for righteousness. After hearing King Benjamin’s great address, his people testified, “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 5:2). We learn from Mosiah 4:3 and 5:7 that this change of heart came as a result of their being “spiritually begotten,” including having their sins remitted, which brought them peace of conscience and great joy. The same testimony comes from King Lamoni and his people at their conversion: “And they did all declare unto the people the selfsame thing—that their hearts had been changed; that they had no more desire to do evil” (Alma 19:33).

It is clear that such a change is required of all who are to inherit the kingdom of God, for the voice of the Lord said to Alma at the time of his spiritual awakening: “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” (Mosiah 27:25). Before his conversion Alma desired to destroy the church of God (see Alma 36:6); after his conversion he longed to build His church and to be with God and angels (see Alma 36:22, 24).

It all seems to fit. Faith (including prayer, repentance, and obedience) prepares a person to receive a spiritual rebirth, which brings a remission of sins and changes the heart so that it desires righteousness. This desire for righteousness is a primary ingredient of hope.

But there is more to hope than longing for righteousness. The Holy Ghost, who plays a major role in bringing about that desire, remains to fill the converted soul with staying power, a spiritual confidence, an assurance that his longings will be realized. Such confidence was reflected in King Benjamin’s people when they said, “We . . . have great views of that which is to come; and were it expedient, we could prophesy of all things” (Mosiah 5:3). Similarly, Alma testified, “I know that he will raise me up at the last day, to dwell with him in glory; yea, and I will praise him forever” (Alma 36:28).

Heaven would not be heaven if we did not want to be there—if our hearts and our very natures were not in complete harmony with the righteousness that is there. Imagine the incongruity of someone struggling white-knuckle-like to keep what he regards as burdensome commandments in order to be saved in the kingdom of God, and once there to feel similarly burdened by the necessity of living those same principles eternally. Indeed, “ye can in nowise be saved in the kingdom of God . . . if ye have no hope” (Moroni 10:21).

Charity

Though spoken of explicitly the fewest number of times (twenty-seven), *charity* is defined and explained in the Book of Mormon more directly and clearly than either faith or hope. Nephi said simply, “Charity is love” (2 Nephi 26:30). Mormon, as quoted by Moroni, expanded this definition to “Charity is the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47). The verses that speak of charity indicate that if we are to be saved in the kingdom of God, we must experience charity in two dimensions, which I will call vertical and horizontal.

Vertical charity refers to the love of Christ has for us, which love motivated the Atonement. Moroni explained: “And again, I remember that thou hast said that thou hast loved the world, even unto the laying down of thy life for the world, that thou mightest take it again to prepare a place for the children of men.

“And now I know that this love which thou hast had for the children of men is charity; wherefore, except men shall have charity they cannot inherit that place which thou hast prepared in the mansions of thy Father” (Ether 12:33–34).

Horizontal charity refers to that love we must feel and extend to others of mankind. Nephi spoke of this dimension when he said:

“I have charity for my people. . . .

“I have charity for the Jew. . . .

“I also have charity for the Gentiles” (2 Nephi 33:7–9).

Mormon explained both dimensions of charity in these words:

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. . . . Charity never faileth” (Moroni 7:45–46).

When our hearts are filled with charity, we love as Christ loved, His goals become our goals, His work becomes our work, and ultimately His glory becomes our glory, for we will become “joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17) of “all that [the] Father hath” (D&C 84:38).

With this thought in mind, and thinking of charity in relation to hope, it might be said that hope is a hungering and thirsting after righteousness for oneself, and charity is essentially a hungering and thirsting after righteousness for others. Not surprisingly, therefore, we find that Lehi, after tasting the fruit of the tree of life, “began to be desirous that [his] family should partake of it also” (1 Nephi 8:12) and that Nephi wrote, “I pray continually for [my people] by day, and mine eyes water my pillow by night, because of them” (2 Nephi 33:3).

Enos, after experiencing the joy of hearing his own sins were remitted, “pour[ed] out [his] whole soul unto God” for “the welfare of [his friends], the Nephites.” And when he had obtained a promise of blessings for them, he then “prayed . . . with many long strugglings for [his enemies], the Lamanites” (Enos 1:9, 11). Following their conversion, Alma and the sons of Mosiah “were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble” (Mosiah 28:3). This same commitment to serving to bless others is shown by all the prophet-leaders of the Book of Mormon.

Charity, like faith and hope before it, is bestowed by God upon those who prepare themselves to receive it. Mormon instructed members of the Church in his day, whom he described as “the peaceable followers of Christ, . . . that have obtained a sufficient hope by which ye can enter into the rest of the Lord” (Moroni 7:3), to “pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ” (Moroni 7:48). Mormon’s plea and his earlier explanation of the characteristics of charity (see Moroni 7:45) show that charity is an outgrowth of faith and hope and encompasses them both. How appropriate it is, then, to speak of these three principles in the order given—faith leads to hope, and then the two develop into charity—charity being the “greatest” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Line upon Line

It is worthwhile to ponder and discuss the gradually unfolding nature of faith, hope, and charity. Alma instructed Zeezrom that men are given a “lesser” or “greater” portion of the “word,” and they enlarge or diminish that portion “according to the heed and diligence which they give unto” it. Those who obey will receive more and more until they know the mysteries of God “in full”; those who harden their hearts receive less and less “until they know nothing concerning his mysteries” (Alma 12:9–11). In this light, Book of Mormon phrases such as “a particle of faith” (Alma 32:27), “much faith” (Mosiah 27:14), “strong” faith (Alma 7:17), “exceeding faith” (Mosiah 4:3), and even “exceedingly great faith” (Moroni 10:11) are clearer and more meaningful.

Similarly, when we receive the baptism of fire that remits sin and brings hope, we do not suddenly vault into full spiritual maturity. In Peter’s words, we are “newborn babes” in need of milk that we “may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). In this connection, it is intriguing to consider the implications of the Savior’s statement that certain Lamanites, “because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not” (3 Nephi 9:20). Undoubtedly, they knew something had happened, for “they were encircled about, yea every soul, by a pillar of fire,” and “they could speak forth marvelous words” (Helaman 5:43, 45), but their understanding of what they were experiencing may have come later.

There is no guarantee that the change of heart involved here will remain forever. Alma asks, “And now behold, I say unto you, my brethren, if ye have experienced a change of heart, and if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, I would ask, can ye feel so now?” (Alma 5:26). We can lose the desire for righteousness. That desire comes from the companionship of the Holy Ghost, and when we become disobedient, or even casual about the gospel, we feel less and less of His power. On the other hand, awareness and obedience bring to us more and more of the power of the Spirit, intensifying our desire for righteousness. Hence, we read of “sufficient hope” (Moroni 7:3), “firm hope” (Alma 34:41), “a more excellent hope” (Ether 12:32), and “a perfect brightness of hope” (2 Nephi 31:20).

I have not found specific evidence in the Book of Mormon that there are portions of charity. Obviously, vertical

charity, Christ’s love for us, is pure, full, perfect, consistent. However, I suspect that horizontal charity, our love for each other, functions on a continuum as do faith and hope.

Faith, Hope, and Charity Centered in Christ

The Savior said, “I will show unto them that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness” (Ether 12:28). The first principle of the gospel is not just “faith,” but “faith in the Lord Jesus Christ” (Articles of Faith 1:4). Similarly, we must obtain not just hope, but a “hope in Christ” (Jacob 2:19), a “hope of his glory” (Jacob 4:4), and “hope for our deliverance in him” (Alma 58:11). Likewise, by simple definition, charity is not just “love,” but “the pure love of Christ” (Moroni 7:47).

To say that true faith, hope, and charity must be centered in Christ may seem to be an unnecessary statement of the obvious. However, as with all other gospel principles, faith, hope and charity have their counterfeits. President Spencer W. Kimball has said, “Whatever thing a man sets his heart and his trust in most is his god; and if his god doesn’t also happen to be the true and living God of Israel, that man is laboring in idolatry.”^[1] There are many causes in the world to which men give their allegiance. They trust (have faith) in their chosen cause; they long for (hope for) the purposes of that cause to be fulfilled, and eagerly desire that others share their commitment and rewards (charity). Many of these causes are commendable, but all are ultimately inadequate to provide permanent solutions to the problems in this world and salvation in the world to come. As the angel instructed King Benjamin, “There shall be no other name given nor any other way nor means whereby salvation can come unto the children of men, only in and through the name of Christ, the Lord Omnipotent” (Mosiah 3:17).

Conclusion

We began with Moroni’s testimony that faith, hope, and charity are necessary for salvation. We close with Moroni’s testimony that these gifts will always be available to those who believe: “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” (Moroni 10:19). May we have the good sense to believe and realize these marvelous gifts in our lives.

^[1] Spencer W. Kimball, “The False Gods We Worship,” *Ensign*, June 1976, 4.