

Gospel Doctrine Lesson 22: "Have Ye Received His Image in Your Countenances?"

(Alma 5-7)

LESSON GOAL: To help us understand what it means to experience a change of heart and continue in the process of conversion.

1. Alma teaches the people how to experience a "mighty change" of heart.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie: "Except in ... unusual circumstances, as with Alma (Mosiah 27), **spiritual rebirth is a process.** It does not occur instantaneously. **It comes to pass by degrees.** Repentant persons become alive to one spiritual reality after another, until they are wholly alive in Christ and are qualified to dwell in his presence forever" (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. [1966-73], 3:401).

Spiritual rebirth is a **PROCESS**, and Alma gives us questions we should ponder and answer periodically as we move down our own path to salvation.

ALMA 5: Alma's Spiritual Checklist of Our Behaviors to Measure Our Spiritual Status

1. 5:14 Have ye **spiritually** been born of God?
2. 5:14 Have ye received **His image** in your countenances?
3. 5:14 Have ye experienced this **mighty change in your hearts?**
4. 5:15 Do ye exercise **faith** in the redemption?
5. 5:15 Do you **look forward** with an eye of faith to the resurrection and judgment?
6. 5:16 Can you imagine that ye **hear the voice of the Lord?**
7. 5:17 Do ye imagine that you can **lie** unto the Lord?
8. 5:18 Can ye imagine your **guilt** before God if you had **ignored his commandments?**
9. 5:19 Can ye look up to God with a **pure heart** and **clean hands?**
10. 5:20 Can ye think being saved when you **yielded to the devil?**
11. 5:22 How will you feel before God with **stained garments?**
12. 5:26 If ye have experienced a **change of heart, can ye feel so now?**
13. 5:27 Have ye walked **blameless** before God?
14. 5:27 Could ye say that ye have been **sufficiently humble?**
15. 5:28 Are ye **stripped of pride?**
16. 5:29 Is there one among you who is not **stripped of envy?**
17. 5:30 Is there one among you that **mocks his brother** (behind his back)?

Alma 5:14 -- "Have ye received his image in your countenances?"

Andrew Skinner: "An 'image' isn't just an outward visual impression but also a vivid representation, a graphic display, or a total likeness of something. It is a person or thing very much like another, a copy or counterpart. Likewise, countenance does not simply mean a facial expression or visual appearance. The word, from old French, originally denoting 'behavior,' 'demeanor,' or 'conduct' was used with these meanings in mind. "Therefore to receive Christ's image in one's countenance means to acquire the Savior's likeness in behavior, to be a copy or reflection of the Master's life. This is not possible without a mighty change in our pattern of living, requiring, too, a change in feelings, attitudes, desires, and spiritual commitment. This involves the heart" (*Studies In Scripture*, 7:301).

Ted Gibbons: "The multitude of questions Alma asks are worth a careful, personal look. But it seems clear that there is one critical question in the sermon that must be answered correctly. That question is asked **five different times** toward the end of the sermon. The question is in Alma 5:53-56 and it is this: **if you are doing any of these things that are contrary to the teaching of the gospel, WILL YE PERSIST?** If you have found something in this sermon that needs your attention, or that needs repentance, **WILL YOU REPENT?** Or will you persist in rebelling against the commandments of God?"

2. Alma and the people establish the order of the Church in Zarahemla.

President Ezra Taft Benson: "The antidote for pride is humility—meekness, submissiveness (Alma 7:23). ... Let us choose to be humble. We can choose to humble ourselves by **conquering enmity** toward our brothers and sisters, esteeming them as ourselves, and **lifting them** as high or higher than we are. ... We can choose to humble ourselves by **receiving counsel** and chastisement. ... We can choose to humble ourselves by **forgiving** those who have offended us. ... We can choose to humble ourselves by **rendering selfless service.** ... We can choose to humble ourselves by going on missions and **preaching the word** that can humble others. ... We can choose to humble ourselves by **getting to the temple** more frequently. ... We can choose to humble ourselves by **confessing and forsaking our sins and being born of God.** ... We can choose to humble ourselves by **loving God, submitting our will to His, and putting Him first in our lives**" (in *Conference Report*, Apr. 1989, 6).

Joseph Fielding McConkie & Robert L. Millet: "The antidote to virtually every spiritual ill is charity. When the people of the Lord's fold are filled with his pure love, they seek to build up one another, take joy in the accomplishments or acquisitions of one another, and feel no desire to have more than they need. Some of the most serious sins known to mankind, such as murder and adultery, are generally due to **pride and envy and covetousness**" (*Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 3: 33).

**The hard-hearted cannot feel the things of the Spirit
because the barrier of personal pride does not allow the Spirit in.**

3. Alma testifies of Jesus Christ to the people of Gideon.

Alma's pure testimony of the Savior is one of the greatest treatises on the atonement in the scriptures. Focus on a word used **FOUR TIMES** in Alma 7 and reflect on the applications associated with that word. The word is **PATH**.

Read Alma 7 and look for the qualities of those who are trying to walk in Christ's path.

1. Alma 7:3—Be **humble**
2. Alma 7:3—Continue in **supplication**
3. Alma 7:3—Be **blameless**
4. Alma 7:6—Don't be lifted up in the **pride** of your hearts
5. Alma 7:6—Don't set your heart upon **riches**
6. Alma 7:6—**Worship** the true and living God
7. Alma 7:6—Look forward to the **remission of your sins**
8. Alma 7:9—**Repent**
9. Alma 7:9—**Prepare** the way of the Lord
10. Alma 7:14—Be **born again**
11. Alma 7:14—Be **baptized**
12. Alma 7:14—Have **faith**
13. Alma 7:15—Come and **fear not**
14. Alma 7:15—**Lay aside** every sin
15. Alma 7:15—Enter into a **covenant** with him to **keep his commandments**
16. Alma 7:22—**Awaken** to a sense of your **duty**
17. Alma 7:23—Be **submissive** and **gentle**
18. Alma 7:23—Be full of **patience** and **long-suffering**
19. Alma 7:23—Be **temperate** in all things
20. Alma 7:23—**Ask God** for whatever you need
21. Alma 7:24—Always **return thanks to God** for what you receive
22. Alma 7:26—Give **diligence** and **heed to the word**

Looking through Alma 7, we see the atonement of Christ more clearly than we have ever seen it before. We are offered a unique view of what the Savior has done for us—a view unlike any other in the scriptures.

Neal A. Maxwell: "It is not enough for us to have once been close to the Savior. (So was Sidney Rigdon.) Alma said, if we have once 'felt to sing the song of redeeming love,' can we 'feel so now?' Dutiful discipleship creates many happy memories, but it does not make nostalgia a substitute for fresh achievement" (*Neal A. Maxwell Quote Book*, 88).

Neal A. Maxwell: In the description of the exquisite suffering of Jesus in His atonement, we are told that **Jesus took upon Himself the infirmities of all of us** in order "that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities" (Alma 7:12). Being sinless Himself, Jesus could not have suffered for personal sin nor known what such agony is—unless He took upon Him our sins, not only to redeem us and to save us, but also in order that He might know how "according to the flesh . . . to succor his people according to their infirmities." A stunning insight! Thus the compassion of the divine Jesus for us is not the abstract compassion of a sinless individual who would never so suffer; rather, it is the compassion and empathy of One who has suffered exquisitely, though innocent, for all our sins, which were compounded in some way we do not understand. Though He was sinless, yet **He suffered more than all of us**. We cannot tell Him anything about suffering. This is one of the inner marvels of the atonement of Jesus Christ! (*All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience*, 35).

Neal A. Maxwell: "Disciples are to make for themselves 'a new heart' by undergoing a 'mighty change' of heart (Alma 5:12–14). **Yet we cannot make such 'a new heart' while nursing old grievances.** Just as civil wars lend themselves to the passionate preservation of ancient grievances, so civil wars within the individual soul—between the natural and the potential man—keep alive old slights and perceived injustices, except in the meek." (*Meek and Lowly*, p. 55)