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Robert L. Millet

The eighth chapter of Moroni contains an epistle Mormon wrote to his son, Moroni, soon after his call to the ministry. It begins with Mormon's encouragement and his expression of confidence in his son, as well as a statement of his daily petition to the heavens in behalf of Moroni. "I am mindful of you always in my prayers," Mormon declares, "continually praying unto God the Father in the name of his Holy Child, Jesus, that he, through his infinite goodness and grace, will keep you through the endurance of faith on his name to the end" (Moroni 8:3). But this epistle was not written solely as an expression of a father's satisfaction on behalf of a faithful son. Rather, Mormon had learned of disputations among the Nephites concerning the baptism of little children. His letter was a powerful appeal to root out and remove such heresy from among the Saints, as well as an explanation as to why that doctrine was abominable and abhorrent to that Lord who loves little children perfectly.

Original Sin

After his vision of the celestial kingdom, the Prophet Joseph Smith recorded, "I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven" (D&C 137:10). This idea was not entirely new to the Prophet in 1836, for he had learned from the Book of Mormon and previous revelations of the Lord's disposition in regard to the status of children. An angel explained to king Benjamin that "the infant

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perisheth not that dieth in his infancy” (Mosiah 3:18). After having described the nature of those who come forth in the first resurrection, Abinadi says simply, “And little children also have eternal life” (Mosiah 15:25). A revelation given in September 1830 specifies that “little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten” (D&C 29:46). What happened, then? Why did the pernicious belief that little children should ever require baptism become an issue amongst the Christian religions of the world?

Nephi beheld in vision that “an exceedingly great many” people would stumble and fall because plain and precious truths would be taken away or kept back from the earliest biblical records and many thereby would wander in doctrinal darkness, eventually becoming subject to the snares of Satan (1 Nephi 13:20–42). Some of the most critical verities of salvation to be lifted or twisted from their pristine purity are the truths dealing with the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. I assume such matters were taught more plainly in the early ages of this world by virtue of the clarity and power in which they are proclaimed and stressed in the Book of Mormon and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. A misunderstanding of the nature of the fall of Adam, for example, has led to some of the most serious heresies and perversions in religious history. Without the exalting knowledge of such matters as the Fall as a foreordained act, a God-inspired and predesigned plan for the perpetuation and preservation of the human family—parent to the atonement of Christ—people struggle to find meaning in the involvement of our first parents in Eden. Others allegorize or spiritualize away the plain meanings of the scriptures regarding the Fall and thus cloud in mystery the true purposes behind the Atonement. When revelation is wanting, when unilluminated people seek for understanding of heavenly and eternal matters, they are left to their own resources—to the powers of reason and the limitations of the human intellect.

One of the most influential philosopher-theologians in Christian history was St. Augustine (AD 350–430), a man whose writings and teachings have had a marked impact on the formulation of both Catholic and Protestant beliefs. S. E. Frost, a historian, describes Augustine’s thought on the doctrine of “original sin” thus:

The first man, Adam, set the pattern for all future life of men. Adam, he taught, committed sin and thus handed on to all men the effects of this sin. He corrupted the entire human race, so that all men are condemned to sin for all times. Adam’s

sin, therefore, is hereditary. But God can reform corrupted man by his grace. . . . Thus man, a creation of the all-ruling power of the universe, created out of nothing, inherits the weaknesses and sins of the first man. He must pay the price for this sin. But the all-ruling can and does select some men for forgiveness and leaves others to the natural results of Adam's sin. Man is lost forever unless the Creator of the universe chooses to save him. (63)

The false doctrine of original sin is based upon the notion that Adam and Eve's disobedience was an act of overt rebellion against the Almighty, an attempt to usurp the knowledge available only to the gods. How much more ennobling and soul-satisfying is the true doctrine of the Fall, the assurance that Adam—also known as Michael, the prince and archangel—"fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Nephi 2:25). How much more gratifying it is to know that through the atonement of Christ, the act of redemption on the part of the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 13:8), "*men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression*" (AF 2; emphasis added).¹ One wonders what a difference it would make in the Christian world if the following simple yet profound truths from Joseph Smith's translation of Genesis had not been lost from the Bible:

And he called upon our father Adam by his own voice, saying: I am God; I made the world, and men before they were in the flesh. And he also said unto him: If thou wilt turn unto me, and hearken unto my voice, and believe, and repent of all thy transgressions, and be baptized, even in water, in the name of mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth, which is Jesus Christ, the only name which shall be given under heaven, whereby salvation shall come unto the children of men, ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, asking all things in his name, and whatsoever ye shall ask, it shall be given you. And our father Adam spake unto the Lord, and said: Why is it that men must repent and be baptized in water? And the Lord said unto Adam: Behold, I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden. Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world. (Moses 6:51–54; also JST Gen 6:52–56; emphasis added)

An equally vicious falsehood which follows on the heels of original sin is the moral depravity of man and his complete inability

¹ For a discussion of the fact that Adam and Eve's act was transgression and not sin, see Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 1:114. An excellent treatment of the view of the Fall is in LaMar Garrard's, "The Fall of Man."

to choose good over evil. As an illustration, S. E. Frost describes the notions of Augustine thus:

The conception of individual freedom was denied by Saint Augustine. According to him, mankind was free in Adam, but since Adam chose to sin, he lost freedom not only for himself, but for all men and for all time. Now no one is free, but all are bound to sin, are slaves of evil. But God makes a choice among men of those whom he will save and those whom he will permit to be destroyed because of sin. This choice is not influenced by an act of an individual man, but is determined only by what God wants.

In Augustine we find both fatalism and predestination as far as the individual man is concerned. With Adam there was no fatalism. He was free. But God knew even then how Adam would act, knew he would sin. Thus, from the beginning God made up his mind whom he would save. These were predestined from the first to salvation, and all the rest were predestined to eternal punishment. (150–51)²

Reasoning of this sort surely came from reading such passages as Romans 7 without the understanding provided by the Prophet Joseph Smith. This particular chapter in the New Testament, for example, suggests that the Apostle Paul (and thus all humans by extension) is a depraved and helpless creature who muddles in sin as a result of a carnal nature, an evildoer with little or no hope of deliverance. The Joseph Smith Translation of Romans 7 presents a significantly different picture of Paul and of all humankind; it might well be called “Paul: Before and After the Atonement,” or “The Power of Christ to Change Men’s Souls.” In the King James Version Paul introspects as follows: “I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. . . . For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Rom 7:14–15, 18). The Joseph Smith Translation lays stress where Paul surely intended it: upon the fact that through the atonement of Christ man is made free from the pull and stain of sin. “When I was under the law [of Moses], I was yet carnal, sold under sin. *But now I am spiritual; for that which I am commanded to do, I do; and that which I am commanded not to allow, I allow not. For what I know is not right I would not do; for that which*

² See also Martin Luther’s debate with Erasmus the humanist on the nature of free will in Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. Henry Cole, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976.

is sin, I hate.” Finally, “For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but to perform that which is good I find not, *only in Christ*” (JST Rom 7:14–16, 19; emphasis added). The testimony of Lehi confirms this truth: “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy. And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And *because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not be acted upon*” (2 Nephi 2:25–26; emphasis added; compare Hel 14:30).

The Practice of Infant Baptism

Infant baptism is the result of a major doctrinal misunderstanding, a lack of appreciation for the full impact of Christ’s atonement upon humankind. A form of the heretical practice seems to predate the Christian era by many centuries. The Lord Jehovah spoke to his servant Abraham of a number of the theological errors of that day, some of which appear to be tied to ignorance of the true nature and scope of the Atonement.

And it came to pass, that Abram fell on his face, and called upon the name of the Lord. And God talked with him, saying, My people have gone astray from my precepts, and have not kept mine ordinances, which I gave unto their fathers; and they have not observed mine anointing, and the burial, or baptism wherewith I commanded them; But have turned from the commandment, and taken unto themselves the washing of children, and the blood of sprinkling; and have said that the blood of the righteous Abel was shed for sins;³ and have not known wherein they are accountable before me. (JST Gen 17:3–7; emphasis added)

This passage clearly demonstrates the inseparable relationship between atonement and accountability. Simply stated, the atonement of Jesus Christ—the greatest act of love and intercession in all eternity—defines the bounds and limits of accountability. One of the unconditional benefits of the Atonement is the fact that no man or woman will be held responsible for or denied blessings related to a law whose adoption and application were beyond their power. This

³ This is a particularly interesting heresy. It may well be that the Apostle Paul had reference to this problem in Hebrews 12:24.

principle underlies the doctrine concerning the salvation of little children who die. Children are not accountable for their deeds and therefore are not required to participate in gospel ordinances prepared for accountable persons.

The level of innocence in children was also a matter which arose in discussions between the Christians and the Jews in the meridian of time. Paul emphasizes that the law of circumcision and “the tradition [should] be done away, which saith that little children are unholy; for it was had among the Jews” (D&C 74:6). Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible is a witness that Jesus taught concerning the innocent status of children: “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels [spirits] do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost, and to call sinners to repentance; but these little ones have no need of repentance, and I will save them” (JST Matt 18:10–11; emphasis added; see also 19:13–14).

During the Great Apostasy (after the first century of the Christian era) the doctrine of infant baptism again reared its ugly head. Elder James E. Talmage writes, “There is no authentic record of infant baptism having been practiced during the first two centuries after Christ, and the custom probably did not become general before the fifth century; from the time last named until the Reformation, however, it was accepted by the dominant church organization” (The Articles of Faith 126). Elsewhere Elder Talmage observes:

Not only was the form of the baptismal rite radically changed [during the time of the apostasy], but the application of the ordinance was perverted. The practice of administering baptism of infants was recognized as orthodox in the third century and was doubtless of earlier origin. In a prolonged disputation as to whether it was safe to postpone the baptism of infants until the eighth day after birth—in deference to the Jewish custom of performing circumcision on that day—it was generally decided that such delay would be dangerous, as jeopardizing the future well-being of the child should it die before attaining the age of eight days, and that baptism ought to be administered as soon after birth as possible. (The Great Apostasy 119)

The false doctrine of infant baptism was introduced in the Americas during approximately the same period. Quoting and expounding upon the Lord’s words to him, Mormon instructed Moroni as follows (from Moroni 8):

1. The Lord came into the world not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance (Moroni 8:8). The immediate application of this principle is, of course, in regard to little children, the only ones, save Jesus only, who live without sin. To say that the whole need no physician is to say that redemption from sin is only requisite for those who are under the bondage of sin (compare Mark 2:17). All others, especially those who suppose they have no sin (see John 9:41; Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8), are in dire need of that safety and security that come only in and through the atoning blood of Christ.

2. Little children are whole, for they are not capable of committing sin (Moroni 8:8). Modern revelation affirms that “little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten,” meaning that the Atonement has been in effect as an integral part of the plan of salvation from the time of our premortal existence. “Wherefore, they cannot sin, for power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable before me” (D&C 29:46–47). It is not to say that children cannot do things that are evil, that they cannot perform deeds that under other circumstances would be called sinful. They certainly can do such things. The revelations teach that their actions are covered by the merciful ministry of our Master. In this sense they cannot sin. Thus, “little children are holy, being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ” (74:7).

3. The “curse of Adam” is taken from children in Christ, that it has no power over them (Moroni 8:8). The “curse of Adam” is presumably the effects of the Fall. In one sense, the curse of Adam, meaning an original sin or “original guilt” (Moses 6:54), is taken away from all men and women. Adam and Eve’s transgression in Eden was forgiven them (Moses 6:53), and no person is held responsible for something our first parents did (AF 2). In another sense, the curse of Adam, meaning the fallen nature that comes as a direct result of the Fall (1 Nephi 10:6; 2 Nephi 2:21; Alma 42:6–12; Ether 3:2), is taken away from children as an unconditional benefit of the atonement of Christ (Mosiah 3:16).

4. The law of circumcision is done away in Christ (Moroni 8:8). Circumcision was instituted in the days of Abraham as a token of the covenant God made with the Father of the Faithful and his posterity. Male children were circumcised at *eight days* as a token and reminder that children are not accountable until they are *eight years*

of age (JST Gen 17:11; compare D&C 68:25). In Moroni 8:8, Mormon teaches that with the atoning sacrifice accomplished, circumcision is no longer required as a part of the Abrahamic covenant.

5. Baptizing infants is solemn mockery before God; to do so is to deny the mercies and atoning power of Christ, as well as the power of the Holy Spirit (Moroni 8:9, 20, 23). To baptize children is to ignore, to shun, to deny outright what has been taught from the beginning of time by prophets and seers—"that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt" (Moses 6:54).

6. Leaders of the Church should teach parents that they must repent and be baptized and humble themselves as their little children (Moroni 8:10). The Savior's command for us to "become as little children" (Matt 18:3) is not alone a call to humility and submission (see Mosiah 3:19); it is a call to become clean, innocent, and justified by virtue of the blood of Christ, through the sanctifying powers of the Holy Ghost. Children are not innocent because they are good by nature. Benjamin taught that "In Adam, or by nature, they fall," but, thankfully, "the blood of Christ atoneth for their sins" (Mosiah 3:16). Children are innocent because the Lord decreed that they be so.

In modern revelation the Lord declares: "Every spirit of man was innocent in the beginning; and God having redeemed man from the fall, men became again, in their infant state, innocent before God" (D&C 93:38). How do persons become again, in "their infant state, innocent before God"? Does this not have reference to the fact that men and women left the premortal existence clean and free from sin through the powers of the Atonement and that they become innocent in regard to law and sin as infants through that same Atonement? Elder Orson Pratt asked:

Why was the Lamb, considered as 'slain from the foundation of the world'? . . . The very fact, that the atonement which was to be made in a future world, was considered as already having been made, seems to show that there were those who had sinned, and who stood in need of the atonement. The nature of the sufferings of Christ was such that it could redeem the spirits of men as well as their bodies. . . . All the spirits when they come here are innocent, that is, if they have ever committed sins, they have repented and obtained forgiveness through faith in the future sacrifice of the Lamb. (54, 56)

7. The ordinance of baptism appropriately follows the principle of repentance. Since little children, through Christ, are in no need of repentance, they are in no need of baptism (Moroni 8:11, 19, 25).

It makes little sense to symbolize a child's rise from spiritual death to life. Little children are alive in Christ—free from the sins of the sinful world (vv 12, 22). Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “Spiritual death passes upon all men when they become accountable for their sins. Being thus subject to sin they die spiritually; they die as pertaining to the things of the Spirit; they die as pertaining to the things of righteousness; they are cast out of the presence of God” (*The Promised Messiah* 349–50).

8. Any who suppose that children need baptism are devoid of faith (Moroni 8:14). They do not believe what Christ has done or what he can do for little children, or, for that matter, for all others. It is impossible to exercise saving faith in that which is untrue (Alma 32:21) or in that of which we are completely ignorant. Faith is based upon evidence or assurance (JST Heb 11:1).

9. Because a belief in infant baptism demonstrates a significant departure from the faith of Jesus Christ, any who continue in this belief shall perish eventually as pertaining to the things of righteousness (Moroni 8:16). Truly, salvation comes only in and through our Lord and Savior (Mosiah 3:17; see also Acts 4:12; Moses 6:52).

10. All children are alike in regard to the atonement of Christ (Moroni 8:17, 19, 22). To borrow Nephi's words, all children, “black and white, bond and free, male and female . . . all are alike unto God” (2 Nephi 26:33; see also Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 2:53, 55).

11. All little children are alive in Christ, as are those “that are without the law. For the power of redemption cometh on all them that have no law” (Moroni 8:22). Two groups of people in scripture are referred to as dying “without law.” The first group consists of the heathen nations, those who will not receive the fulness of gospel light and understanding and who thereby qualify for a terrestrial inheritance (see D&C 45:54; 76:72). The other group consists of those who never have an opportunity to receive the gospel in this life but who would have done so had the opportunity presented itself (D&C 137:7–8). As Jacob explains:

Where there is no law given there is no punishment; and where there is no punishment there is no condemnation; and where there is no condemnation the mercies of the Holy One of Israel have claim upon them, because of the atonement; for they are delivered by the power of him. For the atonement satisfieth the demands of [God's] justice upon all those who have not the law given to them. (2 Nephi 9:25–26)

Truly, as Benjamin declares, Christ's blood "atoneth for the sins of those who have fallen by the transgression of Adam, who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them, or who have ignorantly sinned" (Mosiah 3:11). Or, as Abinadi testifies, those who "died before Christ came, in their ignorance, not having salvation declared unto them" are those who "have part in the first resurrection" (Mosiah 15:24).

12. To baptize children is to deny the mercies of Christ and the power of his Holy Spirit, and to put "trust in dead works" (Moroni 8:23). Dead works are not animated or motivated by the power of the Spirit and are neither God-ordained nor God-approved. In short, to baptize children is to perform ordinances which not only do not channel power from the heavens to the earth and manifest the powers of godliness (D&C 84:20), but instead tend to block that divine power through trifling with sacred things. In this sense, infant baptism is worse than false; it is perverse. Joseph Smith summarizes the issue concisely: "The doctrine of baptizing children, or sprinkling them, or they must welter in hell, is a doctrine not true, not supported in Holy Writ, and is not consistent with the character of God" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 197; hereafter *TPJS*).

Related Questions

A number of questions arise about the salvation of little children. For some of these questions we have adequate answers in scripture or through the teachings of latter-day prophets and apostles. For others, we are left to wait patiently upon the Lord for further light and knowledge. Such questions might be as follows:

- *Why do some children die and others live?* We do not know. "We must assume that the Lord knows and arranges beforehand who shall be taken in infancy and who shall remain on earth to undergo whatever tests are needed in their cases" (McConkie, "The Salvation of Little Children" 6). Lacking a memory of what went before and in some cases having only a general outline of what will come hereafter, Latter-day Saints are not in a position to provide all of the answers to all of the questions that might arise. We rest secure in the knowledge that God is our Father, that he is intimately acquainted with each of us, that he knows the end from the beginning and that he will arrange premortal, mortal, and postmortal conditions for our eternal best

interest. We rest secure in the knowledge that God knows what is best for each of us, and that he will bring to pass those conditions which will maximize our growth and further our opportunities for exaltation.

An eye of faith provides us with a heavenly perspective, a divinely discriminating view of things as God sees them. The Prophet Joseph Smith asks, “Why is it that infants, innocent children, are taken away from us, especially those that seem to be the most intelligent and interesting?” He reflects upon the waywardness of the world and provides at least a partial answer to this most difficult question: “The strongest reasons that present themselves to my mind are these: This world is a very wicked world; and it is a proverb that the ‘world grows weaker and wiser’; if that is the case, the world grows more wicked and corrupt. In the earlier ages of the world a righteous man, and a man of God and of intelligence, had a better chance to do good, to be believed and received than at the present day; but in these days such a man is opposed and persecuted by most of the inhabitants of the earth, and he has much sorrow to pass through here.” Then, evidencing the perspective of those who see with the eye of faith, the Prophet adds, “*The Lord takes many away even in infancy, that they may escape the envy of man, and the sorrows and evils of this present world; they were too pure, too lovely, to live on earth; therefore, if rightly considered, instead of mourning we have reason to rejoice as they are delivered from evil, and we shall soon have them again.*” Finally, Joseph concludes: “The only difference between the old and young dying is, one lives longer in heaven and eternal light and glory than the other, and is freed a little sooner from this miserable wicked world. Notwithstanding all this glory, we for a moment lose sight of it, and mourn the loss, but we do not mourn as those without hope” (TPJS 196–97; emphasis added).

In commenting upon the Prophet’s remarks, Elder Bruce R. McConkie said:

There are certain spirits who come into this life only to receive bodies; for reasons that we do not know, but which are known in the infinite wisdom of the Eternal Father, they do not need the testing, probationary experiences of mortality. We come here for two great reasons—the first, to get a body; the second, to be tried, examined, schooled, and tested under mortal circumstances, to take a different type of probationary test than we underwent in the pre-mortal life. There are some of the children of our Father, however, who come to earth

to get a body—for that reason solely. They do not need the testings of this mortality. (Funeral address)

- *What of the mentally deficient? What is to become of those not capable of distinguishing completely between good and evil, those who never come to comprehend sin and grasp the miracle of forgiveness through the atoning blood of Christ? What is the disposition of the Lord with regard to those who never arrive mentally at the age of accountability, those who are in some way deficient in understanding of these vital matters? The revelations of the Restoration are not silent here. To six elders of the Church in September 1830 the Lord explained: “Little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world through mine Only Begotten; wherefore, they cannot sin, for power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable before me; for it is given unto them even as I will, according to mine own pleasure, that great things may be required at the hand of their fathers.” All who have knowledge have been commanded to repent. Of them who have “no understanding” the Lord has said: “And he that hath no understanding, it remaineth in me to do according as it is written” (D&C 29:46–50; see also D&C 68:25–28). This may also be one group described by Mormon as those who “are without the law” (Moroni 8:22).*

Elder Bruce R. McConkie has written the following concerning the status of the mentally deficient:

It is with them as it is with little children. They never arrive at the years of accountability and are considered as though they were little children. If because of some physical deficiency, or for some other reason unknown to us, they never mature in the spiritual or moral sense, then they never become accountable for sins. They need no baptism; they are alive in Christ; and they will receive, inherit, and possess in eternity on the same basis as do all children. (“The Salvation of Little Children” 6; see also Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 2:55–56)

- *Joseph Smith’s vision of the celestial kingdom indicates that “all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven” (D&C 137:10). The word used is saved. Will they be exalted? With but few exceptions, the word *salvation* as used in scripture means exaltation or eternal life. Abinadi declares in his sermon to the priests of Noah that “little children also have eternal life” (Mosiah 15:25). Joseph Smith states*

that “children will be enthroned in the presence of God and the Lamb; . . . they will there enjoy the fullness of that light, glory, and intelligence, which is prepared in the Celestial Kingdom” (TPJS 200).⁴

- *Will children who die ever be tested?* A righteous man or woman cannot take a backward step spiritually after death; in short, the righteous have completed their days of probation in mortality. Amulek informs us that our disposition here will be our disposition hereafter (see Alma 34:32–35). Such is the case with regard to little children. They were pure in this existence, will be pure in the world of spirits, and will come forth in the resurrection of the pure in heart at the appropriate time. At the time of the second coming of Christ, wickedness will be cleansed from the face of the earth. The great Millennium will be ushered in with power, and then Satan and his hosts will be bound by the righteousness of the people (see 1 Nephi 22:26). During this glorious era of enlightenment, the earth shall be given to the righteous “for an inheritance; and they shall multiply and wax strong, and *their children shall grow up without sin unto salvation*” (D&C 45:58; emphasis added). The devil will be loosed at the end of the Millennium. Could not those who left mortality without trial be tested during that “little season”? Certainly not. These children will already have come forth from the graves as resurrected and immortal beings. How could such persons—whose salvation is already assured—possibly be tested? To reason otherwise is to place God and all exalted beings in peril of apostasy. In the words of President Joseph Fielding Smith:

Satan will be loosed to gather his forces after the millennium. The people who will be tempted, will be people living on this earth, and they will have every opportunity to accept the gospel or reject it. Satan will have nothing to do whatever with little children, or grown people who have received their resurrection and entered into the celestial kingdom. *Satan cannot tempt little children in this life, nor in the spirit world, nor after the resurrection. Little children who die before reaching the years of accountability will not be tempted.* (Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 2:56–57; emphasis added; compare McConkie, “The Salvation of Little Children” 6)

⁴ Some have suggested that the doctrinal context for the Prophet Joseph Smith’s statement about the salvation of little children is D&C 137:7–9, that is, that those children who would have received the gospel had they been afforded the opportunity in this life, shall receive all of the blessings of exaltation. Surely much more remains to be revealed in regard to this glorious concept.

At this point it is helpful to consider the tender words of Mormon: “Behold, I speak with boldness, having authority from God; and I fear not what man can do; for perfect love casteth out all fear. And I am filled with charity, which is everlasting love; wherefore, all children are alike unto me; wherefore, I love little children with a perfect love; and they are all alike and partakers of salvation” (Moroni 8:16–17). We would suppose that God will eventually reveal more of the particulars of this doctrine to the Church through his appointed servants in days to come. In the meantime, however, we are under obligation to believe and teach that which we have received from an omniscient and all-loving God.

- *What is the status of children in and after the Resurrection?* The Prophet Joseph Smith has brought comfort and consolation and comprehension to man in this day regarding death and the world beyond the grave. In speaking in 1842 of the status of children in the resurrection, the Prophet taught:

As concerning the resurrection, I will merely say that all men will come from the grave as they lie down, whether old or young; there will not be ‘added unto their stature one cubit,’ neither taken from it; all will be raised by the power of God, having spirit in their bodies, and not blood. (*TPJS* 199–200; emphasis added)

Some two years later, in the King Follett discourse, Joseph repeated the same doctrine. He delivered the comforting assurance to grieving parents who had lost little ones that they would again enjoy the companionship of their children and that these tiny ones would not grow in the grave, but they would come forth as they had been laid to rest—as children (*History of the Church* 6:316).

Some confusion arose over the years after the Prophet Joseph Smith’s death concerning his teachings on the status of children in the resurrection. Some erroneously claimed the Prophet taught that children would be resurrected as children and never grow, but would remain in that state through all eternity. President Joseph F. Smith collected testimonies and affidavits from a number of persons who had heard the King Follett Sermon, and it was his powerful witness that the Prophet had taught the truth but had been misunderstood by some. President Smith spoke the following in 1895 at the funeral of Daniel W. Grant, the child of Heber J. Grant:

Under these circumstances, our beloved friends who are now deprived of their little one, have great cause for joy and rejoicing, even in the midst of the deep sorrow that they feel at the loss of their little one for a time. They know he is all right; they have the assurance that their little one has passed away without sin. Such children are in the bosom of the Father. They will inherit their glory and their exaltation, and they will not be deprived of the blessings that belong to them. . . . All that could have been obtained and enjoyed by them if they had been permitted to live in the flesh will be provided for them hereafter. They will lose nothing by being taken away from us in this way.

This is a consolation to me. Joseph Smith, the Prophet, was the promulgator under God of these principles. He was in touch with the heavens. God revealed himself unto him, and made known unto him the principles that lie before us, and which are comprised in the everlasting gospel. Joseph Smith declared that the mother who laid down her little child, being deprived of the privilege, the joy, and the satisfaction of bringing it up to manhood or womanhood in this world, would after the resurrection, have all the joy, satisfaction and pleasure, and even more than it would have been possible to have had in mortality, in seeing her child grow to the full measure of the stature of its spirit. If this be true, and I believe it, what a consolation it is. . . . It matters not whether these tabernacles mature in this world, or have to wait and mature in the world to come, according to the word of the Prophet Joseph Smith, the body will develop, either in time or in eternity, to the full stature of the spirit, and when the mother is deprived of the pleasure and joy of rearing her babe to manhood or womanhood in this life, through the hand of death, that privilege will be renewed to her hereafter, and she will enjoy it to a fuller fruition than it would be possible for her to do here. When she does it there, it will be with certain knowledge that the results will be without failure; whereas here, the results are unknown until after we have passed the test. (*Gospel Doctrine* 152–54; see also Smith, “Status of Children in the Resurrection” 567–74)⁵

Children will come forth from the grave as children, be raised to maturity by worthy parents, and be entitled to receive all of the ordinances of salvation that eventuate in the everlasting continuation of the family unit (Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 2:54; see also McConkie, “The Salvation of Little Children” 5). There are no joys of more transcendent beauty than family joys and surely no sorrows more poignant than family sorrows. God lives in the family unit and knows family feelings. He provides a means—through the mediation of his Only Begotten—whereby families may be reunited and affections renewed. “All your losses will be made up to you in the resurrection,” the Prophet Joseph Smith declared, “provided you

⁵ For President Smith’s discussion of the misunderstanding of Joseph’s original teachings, see “Status of Children in the Resurrection.”

continue faithful. By the vision of the Almighty I have seen it" (TPJS 296).

Conclusion

Seeing our day and recognizing full well that because of a great apostasy many plain and precious truths concerning agency, accountability, and atonement would be lost, Mormon and Moroni drew upon their own dealings with a doctrinal difficulty in the Church in order to leave us a confirming witness of the truth concerning the mortal status and eternal salvation of little children. Little children shall live! What more perfect evidence of an omniscient and all-loving God than the doctrine which proclaims that little children who die are heirs of celestial glory! They will have no blessings withheld or opportunities denied. The testimony of the Book of Mormon and the latter-day oracles is certain and clear: children who die before the time of accountability shall come forth in the resurrection of the just and go on to enjoy all of the privileges associated with eternal life and the family unit. In speaking of the fruits of this everlasting principle, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, a modern apostle, wrote:

Truly it is one of the sweetest and most soul-satisfying doctrines of the gospel! It is also one of the greatest evidences of the divine mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In his day the fiery evangelists of Christendom were thundering from their pulpits that the road to hell is paved with the skulls of infants not a span long because careless parents had neglected to have their offspring baptized. Joseph Smith's statements, as recorded in the Book of Mormon and latter-day revelation, came as a refreshing breeze of pure truth: *little children shall be saved*. Thanks be to God for the revelations of his mind where these innocent and pure souls are concerned! ("The Salvation of Little Children" 7)

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