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The Thoughts and Intents of the Heart

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Source: *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar*

Published: Salt Lake City; Cornerstone Publishing, 1999 (1st Edition)

Page(s): 170–172

THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTS OF THE HEART

But this much I can tell you, that if ye do not watch yourselves, and your thoughts, and your words, and your deeds, and observe the commandments of God, and continue in the faith of what ye have heard concerning the coming of our Lord, even unto the end of your lives, ye must perish. And now, O man, remember, and perish not. (Mosiah 4:30)

From this passage, we learn that we will be judged not only on the basis of our actions, but also according to our speech and even our thoughts. The same idea is expressed in Alma 12:14: “For our words will condemn us, yea, all our works will condemn us.” Since all deeds and words are governed by our inward desires, it seems obvious that, in order to control our outward actions, we must begin by directing our thoughts aright.

GOD KNOWS THE THOUGHTS AND INTENTS OF OUR HEARTS

Because he alone knows our thoughts, only the Lord is capable of passing judgment on mankind. Both the Bible and the Book of Mormon teach that God knows our thoughts. Ammon taught that “he knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart; for by his hand were they all created from the beginning” (Alma 18:32).

Indeed, the flood came in punishment because “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). Had the intent of their hearts been better, perhaps

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the generation living at the time of the flood would have been given more time to bring their actions in conformity with their thoughts.

In a letter to his son Moroni, the Nephite prophet Mormon demonstrated the seriousness of correct thoughts, when he wrote, "Behold I say unto you, that he that supposeth that little children need baptism is in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity, for he hath neither faith, hope, nor charity; wherefore, should he be cut off while in the thought, he must go down to hell" (Moroni 8:14). In this example, there is no hint of sinful acts, only of sinful thoughts condemning a man.

THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR THOUGHTS

Mormon stressed the importance of righteous thinking during his discourse on the subject of faith, hope, and charity:

For I remember the word of God, which saith by their works ye shall know them; for if their works be good, then they are good also. For behold, God hath said a man being evil cannot do that which is good; for if he offereth a gift, or prayeth unto God, except he shall do it with real intent it profiteth him nothing. For behold, it is not counted unto him for righteousness. For behold, if a man being evil giveth a gift, he doeth it grudgingly; wherefore it is counted unto him the same as if he had retained the gift; wherefore he is counted evil before God. And likewise also is it counted evil unto a man, if he shall pray and not with real intent of heart; yea, and it profiteth him nothing, for God receiveth none such. Wherefore, a man being evil cannot do that which is good; neither will he give a good gift. (Moroni 7:5-10)

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The stress Mormon placed on praying “with real intent of heart” was probably what influenced his son Moroni to admonish that future readers of the Book of Mormon pray about the truthfulness of the book “with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ” (Moroni 10:4). But the idea began a millennium earlier with Nephi, who admonished, “follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins” (2 Nephi 31:13).

Alma gave similar counsel regarding prayer: “Yea, and cry unto God for all thy support; yea, let all thy doings be unto the Lord, and whithersoever thou goest let it be in the Lord; yea, let all thy thoughts be directed unto the Lord; yea, let the affections of thy heart be placed upon the Lord forever” (Alma 37:36).

CONCLUSION

The message is clear: While men observe only their actions and speech, God knows the thoughts and intents of their hearts. It is impossible to deceive him, and it is impossible to be truly righteous unless all three of these expressions of our character are in harmony with God’s will.