



Alma 37.⁹— Meditation

Yea, I say unto you, were it not for these things that these records do contain, which are on these plates, Ammon and his brethren could not have convinced so many thousands of the Lamanites of the incorrect tradition of their fathers; yea, these records and their words brought them unto repentance; that is, they brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer.

I have heard it said that “living the gospel is simple.” I don’t know how true that is, but when it comes to repentance, it seems to me that we have made it anything but simple. Repentance is often described as a multi-step—how many steps, I can’t even keep track of anymore—process, that left me with the feeling that it was a very difficult and drawn-out affair. One practically needs a computer to pull it off. After hearing the process described, I have often responded with a, “Phew,” and even a, “Yuck,” followed with a, “I’ll never pull all that off.”

I suppose this is one of the reasons that Alma’s statement about repentance found in today’s reading has always been a bit of a lifeline to me. Before explaining what I learn from Alma about repentance, a brief grammatical lesson might be in order.

Suppose I said, “I went to the store, that is, I went shopping.” Or, “He yelled at the cashier, that is, he treated the cashier rudely.” What is the purpose of my, “that is,” statement? My “that is” statements serve to emphasize or clarify the preceding statement. A “that is” statement can serve as a kind of grammatical equal sign (=). In my first example, my second statement (“that is”) emphasizes or clarifies why I went to the store—to shop. In the second, my, “that is” statement emphasizes or clarifies that in speaking of one’s yelling at the cashier, I meant to signify the rudeness of the one doing the yelling.

What do grammatical equal signs have to do with today’s reading? Alma utilizes the grammatical equal sign, “that is” to explicate what repentance, first and foremost, meant to him.

“These records and their words brought them [the Lamanites] unto repentance; *that is*, they brought them to the knowledge of the Lord their God, and to rejoice in Jesus Christ their Redeemer.”

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Now, some may feel that such equivalencies are inadequate. To which I would say, “First, if these equivalencies feel inadequate, you’ll need to take it up with Alma. They are Alma’s not mine.”

For those who feel Alma's equivalent inadequate, many would likely be more satisfied with an equivalency that goes something like this: "These records and their words brought them unto repentance; that is they brought them to forsake sin."

However—and I say this with some trepidation—"repentance" ≠ "forsaking of sin." The forsaking of sin is a long, life-long process with lots and lots of stumbles and falls. That is, the forsaking of sin is a *consequence* of repentance, not repentance itself." Repentance may lead, eventually and painstakingly, to sins being forsaken. But it is not what it means to repent. The forsaking of sin is certainly not a "prerequisite" for forgiveness. No. No. No. A thousand times no! If one can only say they have repented after every sin has been forsaken, then no one has ever repented in the history of mankind!

Every day is a season of repentance. Lent is a season to consider repentance and redouble our efforts. In that effort, we can know the experience and joy of repentance by increasing our "knowledge of the Lord [our] God. We can seek to "rejoice in Jesus Christ [our] Redeemer" more fully. We can discover the depth of His "goodness... his matchless power, and his wisdom, and his patience, and his long-suffering toward the children of men."¹ This is a repentance that brings immediate release and peace of conscience. That's a repentance that possesses the power to do the life-long work of forsaking sin.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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¹ See Mosiah 4.⁶