

CHAPTER XIII

Literary Problems Involving I Corinthians 12, 13 and Other New Testament Books

Chapters seven and ten of the Book of Moroni contain teachings which so closely parallel passages in I Corinthians 12, 13 that they constitute a literary problem. Let us focus our attention first on Moroni 10:8-17 and its parallel in I Corinthians 12:4-11. These scriptures deal with the gifts of the Spirit which are bestowed on man in various forms. The passage in Moroni reads as follows:

And again, I exhort you, my brethren, that ye deny not the gifts of God, for they are many; and they come from the same God. And there are different ways that these gifts are administered; but it is the same God who worketh all in all; and they are given by the manifestations of the Spirit of God unto men, to profit them. For behold, to one is given by the Spirit of God, that he may teach the word of wisdom; and to another, that he may teach the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; and to another, exceeding great faith; and to another, the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; and again, to another, that he may work mighty miracles; and again, to another, that he may prophesy concerning all things; and again, to another, the beholding of angels and ministering spirits; and again, to another, all kinds of tongues; and again, to another, the interpretation of languages and of divers kinds of tongues. And all these gifts come by the Spirit of Christ; and they come unto every man severally, according as he will (Moroni 10:8-17).

For the sake of convenience in comparison we also quote herewith the passage in I Corinthians:

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations,

but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will (I Cor. 12:4-11)

That there is more than a casual connection between these two scriptures is apparent to everyone. To be sure, there are great differences between the two texts, but great likenesses also exist. It is but natural that critics of the Book of Mormon should call our attention to these facts, and explain them by saying that Joseph Smith simply "lifted" the ideas from the New Testament and used them to suit himself. The concept that Moroni, living on this continent about A. D. 420 (Moroni 10:1), and far removed from copies of the New Testament, would have access to Paul's writings seems unworthy of their serious consideration.

That there is a problem we grant readily enough, and we shall attempt a reasonable explanation of it. Critics of the Book of Mormon should remember that one of its premises is that the resurrected Christ came to the ancient Nephites, taught them the Gospel in person, and established His Church among them. It is inconceivable that He would fail to instruct them concerning the gifts of the Spirit. To be sure, there is no mention of spiritual gifts by the Savior in his reported sermons in 3 Nephi 11-28. But it should be kept in mind that 3 Nephi reports only "the lesser part of the things which he taught the people" (3 Nephi 26:8). Any mention of the gifts of the Spirit by the Savior might have been withheld for good and sufficient

reasons. (See 3 Nephi 26:12.) That our Lord did emphasize these gifts would seem to be indicated by the following statement of Mormon's:

Yea, woe unto him that shall deny the revelations of the Lord, and that shall say the Lord no longer worketh by revelation, or by *prophecy*, or by *gifts*, or by *tongues*, or by *healings*, or by the power of the Holy Ghost! (3 Nephi 29:6, italics ours.)

Moreover, Moroni exhorts us that "every good gift cometh of Christ" (Moroni 10:18). We make these points clear in order to drive home another: Moroni doubtless had immediate access to the Savior's teachings concerning the gifts of the Spirit and used them in the manner found in Moroni 10:8-17. The critic may admit that our explanation of the appearance of these teachings in this scripture is reasonable and logical enough, looking at it purely from the Book of Mormon standpoint. That is to say, the Book of Mormon is consistent within itself. However, most critics do not agree with the Book of Mormon contention that Christ did appear in person and teach on this continent. What then? We cannot, of course, force men to believe anything, whether fact or fancy. But we can point to the strong possibility that Paul was not the exclusive author of the ideas contained in I Corinthians 12:4-11 concerning spiritual gifts. Isn't it reasonable to believe that the great apostle adapted an important body of teachings common to the early Christian Church to suit his needs in dealing with the Corinthians? It would seem to the writer that Jesus was far more likely to have been the original author of the doctrines concerning spiritual gifts than was Paul. According to this view the latter simply drew on the teachings of Jesus in much the same way that Moroni did. Paul and Moroni were expositors and teachers of a gospel common to both. Moroni, like Paul, might well have said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (I Cor. 11:1.) It should be emphasized that we

are attempting here to give only a reasonable answer to the problem raised; absolute proof is wanting. We cannot prove beyond doubt that Jesus preached a sermon on spiritual gifts either to the Nephites or to His Palestinian followers, records of which could be drawn on by Moroni and Paul. However, it is a very attractive and reasonable presumption that he did. In saying this we are entirely aware that many scholars in recent years have based discussions of the origin of Christianity upon the teachings of the Apostle Paul. To such critics we point out that even if Paul did not have a discourse on spiritual gifts by Jesus on which to draw, there is left the possibility that he received a revelation on the subject. Notice Paul's words:

Now brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? (I Cor. 14:6)

Revelation was not unknown to Paul. He may well have received a revelation on spiritual gifts as did Joseph Smith on one occasion. The latter's revelation is recorded in D. & C. 46:8-27 and is strikingly original, differing in many respects from I Cor. 12:4-11 and Moroni 10:8-17, though its spirit is the same. While the author recognizes the possibility that Moroni and Paul may have received their knowledge of spiritual gifts by revelation, he believes that they received instructions both from leaders of the Church and from scriptures which gave the very words of Jesus on the subject.

Now, let us turn to the literary problem raised by the presence of extracts from I Corinthians 13 in Moroni 7:45-47. Nearly all of Chapter 7 in the Book of Moroni is presented as a sermon by Moroni's father, Mormon, as he taught in a synagogue. The sermon deals with faith, hope, and charity. Most persons, we are sure, would be willing to admit that the bulk of it is as original as one could reasonably expect of a preacher dealing with a familiar sub-

ject. However, verses 45 and 46 parallel I Corinthians 13: 4-8 so closely in some respects that they must be accounted for. The Book of Mormon text is quoted here:

And 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. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, if ye have not charity, ye are nothing, for charity never faileth. Wherefore, cleave unto charity, which is the greatest of all, for all things must fail—(Moron) 7:45, 46).

With this may be compared the parallel in I Corinthians:

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away (I Cor. 13:4-8).

The reader must notice several obvious differences as well as the likenesses in these texts. The word “and” appears several times in the Nephite text, whereas it is absent in Corinthians. The clauses “charity vaunteth not itself” and “doth not behave itself unseemly” are conspicuously absent from Mormon's version. With all due respect to the readings in I Corinthians, it must be admitted that the Book of Mormon text has a certain freshness in its presentation that merits consideration. Nevertheless, many phrases are word for word the same as in the King James version. Here the author frankly admits the possibility that Joseph Smith used the familiar version as he trans-

lated Mormons words; whenever the two versions differed substantially he inserted the Nephite reading. And, again, we point to the probability that Paul and a Nephite prophet had access to a common body of teaching. Christ was the original author of the great teachings on faith and charity; Mormon and the great apostle to the Gentiles simply adapted the teachings of our Lord common to the Nephites and Jews as seemed good to them. Many sincere persons may be shocked at the suggestion that Paul was not the author of the great ideas underlying I Corinthians 13. The writer recognizes that Paul may be credited with a certain originality in presenting them but believes that much, even of the exact phraseology, is due to our Lord who taught the same great doctrines in America and Palestine.

We turn now to examples of other Nephite scriptures which have fairly close parallels in the New Testament. The average reader will probably be most interested in examples which may be drawn from Nephite records antedating the coming of Christ. Two or three will suffice for our purposes here. The first is taken from 2 Nephi 33:9:

I also have charity for the Gentiles. But behold, for none of these can I hope except they shall be reconciled unto Christ, and enter into the narrow gate, and walk in the straight path which leads to life, and continue in the path until the end of the day of probation.

A parallel to this passage is found in Matthew 7:13,14:

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

A second example is found in Mosiah 5:8 where, in speaking of Christ, King Benjamin says:

There is no other name given whereby salvation cometh; therefore, I would that ye should take upon you the name of Christ; . . .

This scripture has a parallel in Acts 4:12:

Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

For a third and last example we offer the following from Mosiah 16:7, 8:

And if Christ had not risen from the dead, or have broken the bands of death that the grave should have no victory, and that death should have no sting, there could have been no resurrection. But there is a resurrection, therefore the grave hath no victory, and the sting of death is swallowed up in Christ.

The parallel to this teaching is, of course, the familiar passage in I Corinthians 15:54, 55:

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

The citations from the Book of Mormon are sufficiently like their New Testament parallels to excite comment. It should be observed that each of the citations given has some connection either with Christ or a common Christian teaching. The Nephite prophets before the Savior's advent all looked forward to His coming and understood the spirit of His teachings. Thus Jacob, one of them, says:

For, for this intent have we written these things, that they may know that we knew of Christ, and we had a hope of his glory many hundred years before his coming; and not only we ourselves had a hope of his glory, but also all the holy prophets which were before

us. Behold, they believed in Christ and worshiped the Father in his name, and also we worship the Father in his name. And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son, Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son. Wherefore, we search the prophets, and we have many revelations and the spirit of prophecy; and having all these witnesses we obtain a hope, and our faith cometh unshaken, insomuch that we truly can command in the name of Jesus and the very trees obey us, or the mountains, or the waves of the sea (Jacob 4: 4-6).

This quotation emphasizes a common Latter-day Saint teaching to the effect that the doctrines of Jesus were given to men from the earliest ages. Christianity was in the world from the beginning. Consequently, many of the teachings of inspired men were bound to be similar to those of Christ in the New Testament. Certain early scriptures containing Christian teachings were apparently available to Paul which we do not at present have. In the citation from I Corinthians 15:54 (see above) it will be noticed that he says, "Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written..." The "word" or "saying" then follows. No single passage of scripture in our possession contains all of this saying. The writer is aware that most scholars attribute it to Paul's combining Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14. However, there exists the possibility that Isaiah and Hosea were both quoting from a still earlier prophecy unknown to us which had the saying substantially as quoted by the apostle. Even if this supposition is incorrect, we can point to the fact that both the Nephite prophets and Paul agree in their use of Isaiah and Hosea.

We emphasize here the fact that different prophets may have somewhat similar inspiration in dealing with a

given subject. This inspiration may be expressed in very similar language. In considering the Book of Mormon we have to take the translator into account. When the prophet Joseph Smith came to a passage which contained statements which reminded him of similar ones in the New Testament, he was doubtless influenced by their wording and used them whenever it was possible to do so.