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In this discourse Alma refers to two basic gospel terms that make all the difference in the world, faith, and belief. What are they and where do they come from?

Belief

Belief is a choice we make. No one can make us believe anything. How often have you known someone (perhaps even yourself) who have believed a lie. What about those who have refused to believe something you know to be true? No one can force someone else to believe one way or another. Belief is a choice we have to make on our own, for in this life absolute knowledge is out of our reach most of the time. We must each decide for our self whether what we learn is believable, credible, or even possible. Our capacity to believe something is as individual as our choice to believe. I think this is why we have no business condemning someone else for what they choose to believe.

I marvel that there were any, let alone one third of the children of God, who lived in His presence and still chose to believe the lies of Lucifer. They were willing to be cast out of heaven rather than submit to God's will, knowing that it would mean misery for eternity. Surely no one thinks that God, loving His children as He does would allow them to get to the point of expulsion from His presence without first making their fate known to them in the hopes they would change their mind.

Belief is much like our moral agency in that no one can take it away from us. What we choose to believe in or not believe is completely our choice and we will answer for those choices in the day of judgment. This also tells me that God has given us ways of making better choices. I believe this is one of the duties of the Holy Spirit and the light of Christ. These two avenues encourage us to believe things that are true and identify things that are not. Both are subtle and take effort to accept, but are in reach for anyone who is willing to at least try to listen to them. Their efforts are always with us. It is up to us to pay attention.

Faith

Faith has two parts. First, it is putting what we choose to believe into action. We cannot exercise our faith, our belief, unless we do something about what we have chosen to believe. Second, faith is supposed to cause us to change for the better. Faith strengthens us, creates a better version of us. It helps us grow and mature spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. But putting action to a fantasy belief, which means believing in something that is not true, cannot produce the results we hope to achieve from our belief. So faith must be based on truth. Only truth can cause us to experience the joy of change that lifts us and makes us better people.

Even though belief is nothing more than a hope of the truthfulness of something, faith (action) in that thing that is truthful brings actual changes in our life that show us in a real and tangible way that what we chose to believe in, put our hopes in, was a good choice. If we choose to act on (put our faith in) something that is based on error or fantasy - that which is not based on truth - no good results can come from it. We will not grow as a person. Our ability to follow God will not increase, and our character will not be enhanced by what we have chosen to believe. This is the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual proof that belief and faith must be based on truth to make a difference in our life.

Remember that faith is our willingness to put our belief into action, to live by what we believe. This takes commitment and integrity. We must live in a way that demonstrates that we are willing to put our belief to the test and see it through to completion. Either it will vindicate us and our actions by demonstrating that what we chose to believe in is based on the truth or we will see that we have been following a dead end trail that leads nowhere. Either way we must use the same methods to "prove" our chosen belief.

Alma 32:21 tells us that for faith to work as intended we must base our hopes in something that is true. That makes sense, since basing hope in something that is false cannot ever create the result in our life we would hope to achieve. That is just unrealistic. We are searching for truth. All of us want to be living our lives based on what is true, for living in any other way brings only bitterness and disappointment.

> 21 And now as I said concerning faith—faith is not to have a perfect knowledge of things; therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true.

I like Alma's reminder in verse 21 that what we are hoping for cannot be seen. God is telling us that He desires for us to want to believe in Him. If we will just give Him that much He will prove Himself to us. I think that is a pretty generous offer. Satan always says, prove it to me first then I will believe. But even a physical proof can be disbelieved. How many times have you been convinced that what you saw with your own eyes was just a trick? God knows that these signs and wonders the wicked always demand are pointless, for they never work. Either we choose to believe or we don't, but if we choose to believe Him we are promised that the proof will follow, and that proof will be of a sort that we cannot deny. It will be so evident that it will be strong enough evidence that He can use that proof as part of our judgment at the last day.

Alma introduces his topic

> 26 Now, as I said concerning faith—that it was not a perfect knowledge—even so it is with my words. Ye cannot know of their surety at first, unto perfection, any more than faith is a perfect knowledge.
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> 27 But behold, if ye will awake and arouse your faculties, even to an experiment upon my words, and exercise a particle of faith, yea, even if ye can no more than desire to believe, let this desire work in you, even until ye believe in a manner that ye can give place for a portion of my words.

Let's look at verse 27. Starting from the back of the verse I'll work my way to the front of the verse.

God's desire is only that we desire Him over anything or anyone else. If we can just muster enough of a desire to know the truth, that is something He can work with to give us the proof we seek. But we have to come to Him with our desire. This honors our moral agency. We must make the choice to come to Him. He cannot force Himself on us in any way. This return to God must be initiated by us and maintained by us all the way. That is how agency works. God honors our agency 100%.

What does Alma mean when he says that we need to believe in such a manner that we "can give place for a portion of my words"? I think this means we need to make room in our heart for the possibility that his words are true and that there is a way to prove that they are true. This experiment Alma is about to propose can be universally used for any truth we come across. We must be willing to let the possibility of something into our life

and be willing to test it, to prove it, so we can learn if it has the power to change us for the better we hope it has.

This method of proving something's truthfulness is all based on our search for happiness. God's plan for our salvation is called the great plan of happiness. All that Alma is proposing here is part of our search for happiness, for there is no lasting happiness in falsehoods, only in truth. That is a universal truth no one can escape.

The first part of verse 27 says that we need to "awake and arouse your faculties." Belief can be stagnant. I can believe something to be true, but not act upon that belief. Many people believe the Church is true, but choose not to live their lives based on that belief. For them it is too much work or they would rather do something different than have to put in the labor required to live by the covenants they have made. Stagnant belief is fruitless and leads to our condemnation at the last day. Faith is an action word. It produces change and creates goodness. That is the nature of faith, since it is based on truth and that is how God lives (based on truth).

Putting faith into action requires us to act as though our belief is true, even though at the moment we don't yet know if it is true. By acting as though we have chosen to believe the truth, God must now provide that proof as He has promised to do. This is what is meant by us awaking from the slumber of inactivity and arousing our faculties to action. I hope verse 27 is more clear now.

Planting the seed

> 28 Now, we will compare the word unto a seed. Now, if ye give place, that a seed may be planted in your heart, behold, if it be a true seed, or a good seed, if ye do not cast it out by your unbelief, that ye will resist the Spirit of the Lord, behold, it will begin to swell within your breasts; and when you feel these swelling motions, ye will begin to say within yourselves—It must needs be that this is a good seed, or that the word is good, for it beginneth to enlarge my soul; yea, it beginneth to enlighten my understanding, yea, it beginneth to be delicious to me.
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> 29 Now behold, would not this increase your faith? I say unto you, Yea; nevertheless it hath not grown up to a perfect knowledge.

Alma says that if we don't "resist the Spirit of the Lord" we will begin to see that our experimenting on the gospel principle we are testing will begin to make changes within us. Remember how I said early on that the Holy Spirit and the light of Christ are always

present and encouraging our willingness to believe the truths of the gospel? This is what I was talking about. When we choose to accept a principle of the gospel as truth then follow that acceptance with a willingness to live it so we can discover the proof that it is true, the Spirit is allowed to make changes within us that demonstrate that we have chosen wisely.

The "swelling motions" mentioned in verse 28 refer to the testimony being given to us by the Spirit that what we chose to believe is true. These changes, evidences given to us by the Spirit are generally small, incremental proofs that lead us on step by step toward a sure knowledge. Why step by step instead of all at once? It is because if we were to be given a surety of knowledge that we are not yet prepared to live by then we will be judged according to what we know, and that knowledge may be too overwhelming for us just yet. So God, in His mercy, gives us knowledge only as we are prepared to receive it and live by it. This is why we must prove that we want more by living what we already have.

To quote myself, "knowledge is the currency of heaven." Until we are ready for more knowledge, none will be given. Wealth in the eternities is based on knowledge, not possessions. The wealthiest is God, who knows everything there is to know. We are just starting this path to knowledge, and we must practice what we learn to show Him we deserve and are ready for more. The "seed" or gospel principle or commandment is planted within our heart and left to either grow through use and practice (exercising faith in its truthfulness) or it is dug up and tossed aside by unbelief.

Remember that truth is light, ignorance is darkness. Scripturally speaking to live in spiritual darkness is to slumber in the sleep of death. To awaken is to become aware of truth, which enlightens our life and brings us happiness. We need to keep these truths in mind as we study Alma's discourse on faith.

Alma's final reminder at the end of verse 29 is that what we receive from the Spirit, our proof that what we chose to believe is correct, is only a small part of the whole truth. But even if it isn't the whole truth, it is enough that we can tell that our heart has been changed. We have been in some way enlarged and are better because of this acceptance of something we are choosing to prove. God is proving to us that we have chosen well, and it is apparent to us that changes are being made within us. This is the swelling motion Alma refers to. All truth is light and is therefore detectable. This is the

knowledge that will be used in our judgment, for it is born by the Spirit into our soul and it meshes itself into the very fibers of our being. Once given we cannot easily discard it. We would have to deliberately rebel against what we now know to be the truth. This is what the Nephite people did that earned their destruction. They knew the truth and deliberately rejected it. God had to destroy them for they no longer had the ability to repent. They had embraced Satan's darkness and ignorance with all their hearts. They were beyond God's ability to help them any longer. So sad.

The seed begins to grow

Part of the following verses are redundant, but contain a point or two worth mentioning.

> 30 But behold, as the seed swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, then you must needs say that the seed is good; for behold it swelleth, and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow. And now, behold, will not this strengthen your faith? Yea, it will strengthen your faith: for ye will say I know that this is a good seed; for behold it sprouteth and beginneth to grow.
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> 31 And now, behold, are ye sure that this is a good seed? I say unto you, Yea; for every seed bringeth forth unto its own likeness.
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> 32 Therefore, if a seed groweth it is good, but if it groweth not, behold it is not good, therefore it is cast away.
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> 33 And now, behold, because ye have tried the experiment, and planted the seed, and it swelleth and sprouteth, and beginneth to grow, ye must needs know that the seed is good.

Like a plant that we can see sprout and put forth leaves, so we know that the seed was good, when we embrace and give place for a principle of the gospel in our heart we water it through our action (faith) in our belief that what we have embraced is true. When I choose to believe that God is real and that He can speak to me, as insignificant as I feel I am, I start on a path of discovery. I pray to Him, which is exercising my faith, my belief put into action, that He can and will speak to me. When I begin to feel the peace that comes from the Spirit telling me that what I chose to believe is right, I can see that seed sprouting and beginning to grow. I am sensing the truth of what I chose to believe and act upon. It is changing me and I can tell that it is making changes.

If I am willing to continue on in my experiment with my chosen belief then this process will continue. If I panic and choose disbelief then I have just killed the plant by pulling it out of my soul and tossing it aside. I am back where I started. Hard to believe, but this actually happens a lot. Sometimes people panic at the possibilities that God can actually talk to them and wants to do it. Receiving answers to their prayers frightens them even though it feels good. They sense the future possibilities and the weight of what that might mean. Satan uses this momentary doubt to try to get them to reject what they had embraced so they don't move out of their old habits. In the parable of the sower these are the people or seeds that fall among stony ground.

Growing the plant

Feel free to just glance through this next part if you have already read the verses and are familiar with them. I only need to point out a couple of things here.

> 34 And now, behold, is your knowledge perfect? Yea, your knowledge is perfect in that thing, and your faith is dormant; and this because you know, for ye know that the word hath swelled your souls, and ye also know that it hath sprouted up, that your understanding doth begin to be enlightened, and your mind doth begin to expand.
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> 35 O then, is not this real? I say unto you, Yea, because it is light; and whatsoever is light, is good, because it is discernible, therefore ye must know that it is good; and now behold, after ye have tasted this light is your knowledge perfect?
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> 36 Behold I say unto you, Nay; neither must ye lay aside your faith, for ye have only exercised your faith to plant the seed that ye might try the experiment to know if the seed was good.
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> 37 And behold, as the tree beginneth to grow, ye will say: Let us nourish it with great care, that it may get root, that it may grow up, and bring forth fruit unto us. And now behold, if ye nourish it with much care it will get root, and grow up, and bring forth fruit.
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> 38 But if ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root; and when the heat of the sun cometh and scorcheth it, because it hath no root it withers away, and ye pluck it up and cast it out.

Faith is used to prove something spiritual in nature. Once we have proven it our faith is replaced with knowledge. This is why Alma says that our faith is dormant or sleeps, for we have used it and it has fulfilled its purpose, which is to prove truth. What we need to remember is that faith (action based on what we choose to believe) is supposed to be

repetitive. We only receive a part of the truth at a time, so faith cannot give us everything all in one go at it. We need to keep living by what we know so that we can exercise faith and learn more truth. This is how we progress in the gospel line by line, here a little and there a little. God gives us truth only as we are ready for it as a mercy to us. Remember that.

Once we have begun to prove something and we now know that it is true, are we finished? Well yes, in that we have proven what we set out to prove, but no, because we have only learned the smallest part of the truth we hope to learn. So we repeat the process and live what we now know for a time until the Lord adds to our knowledge and testimony of that truth, at which point we begin again by living the truth we now know, etc.

This process of repetitiously living by faith is how we endure to the end. It is how we prove God in all things, for everything can be learned in this way. The goal in Alma's story of the seed is for the plant to grow and bear fruit, which is the joy we find in God. We find that joy because we are learning along the way to live like Him. We experience first hand His kindness, mercy, love, and forgiveness. All of these things bring us joy that is everlasting.

The final goal

> 42 And because of your diligence and your faith and your patience with the word in nourishing it, that it may take root in you, behold, by and by ye shall pluck the fruit thereof, which is most precious, which is sweet above all that is sweet, and which is white above all that is white, yea, and pure above all that is pure; and ye shall feast upon this fruit even until ye are filled, that ye hunger not, neither shall ye thirst.
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> 43 Then, my brethren, ye shall reap the rewards of your faith, and your diligence, and patience, and long-suffering, waiting for the tree to bring forth fruit unto you.

All Alma has described here is a simple cycle of choosing, proving, living by the new knowledge then repeating the cycle. Do this over and over again until so much knowledge has been gained that our life is filled with unspeakable amounts of joy in the Lord. As Alma points out, there is satisfaction in this. He says that we will never hunger or thirst again. That hunger and thirst is our craving for the relief from ignorance and our feeling lost because we don't know what is right. By choosing God and His ways He satisfies that longing within us and we we find rest in Him. We are filled with the things

that bring Him joy, and we find that they bring us joy as well. We feel His love. This is the fruit of the tree Alma talks about.

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