

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 9

In D&C 6 and 8 Cowdery is said to have been granted the gift of translation, here that gift is revoked. Cowdery's translation was entirely optional. When Cowdery desired the gift, that was fine with the Lord, so He granted it. But Cowdery did not follow through on it, and that was fine with the Lord too.

The message for us is there are opportunities for us to request additional gifts, and if we act on it then we can develop them. But, the matter is entirely optional and we must take the initiative to ask for and then develop the gift. If we obtain a gift and do not use it, it is our will that is frustrated not the Lord's.

This case exhibits the kind of interactive relationship we can have with the Lord and how much agency we can exercise in that relationship without upsetting Him.

It seems likely the "gift of translation" was that Cowdery was permitted access to and use of the Urim & Thummim. If it were some other academic process of self-education, then Cowdery could persist in that without the Lord's direct assistance as a spiritual gift.

1 Behold, I say unto you, my son, that because you did not translate according to that which you desired of me, and did commence again to write for my servant, Joseph Smith, Jun., even so I would that ye should continue until you have finished this record, which I have entrusted unto him. 2 And then, behold, other records have I, that I will give unto you power that you may assist to translate. 3 Be patient, my son, for it is wisdom in me, and it is not expedient that you should translate at this present time. 4 Behold, the work which you are called to do is to write for my servant Joseph. 5 And, behold, it is because that you did not continue as you commenced, when you began to translate, that I have taken away this privilege from you. 6 Do not murmur, my son, for it is wisdom in me that I have dealt with you after this manner.

v1-6 The Lord indicates that because of Cowdery's own inaction the gift of translation is revoked (v. 1-5). But, Cowdery should not complain about the revoking of this blessing as it is in the Lord's interest for him to keep writing as Smith translates.

v1 The text of this verse in the Book of Commandments has "which I have intrusted unto you" instead of "which I have entrusted unto him". Likely emended to clarify who physically held the original record. As both Smith and Cowdery were involved in the translation of the record, both were entrusted

with the process, hence the "you" in the original.

7 Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. 8 But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. 9 But if it be not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget the thing which is wrong; therefore, you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me. 10 Now, if you had known this you could have translated; nevertheless, it is not expedient that you should translate now.

v7-10 The Lord indicates more is required on the part of the individual than simply asking for something (v. 7). He states a person must study something out on their own, come to their own conclusion and then ask the Lord for validation. If the conclusion is right, the Lord will manifest it (v. 8), but if it is not right, the Lord will also manifest it. Thus, one cannot write Scripture unless the Lord inspires the individual (v. 9). Had Cowdery known this, he could have translated. But, attempting to do so is no longer appropriate (v. 10).

This kind of formula obviously has general application, but we should be careful not to remove the statement too from its original context, namely that Cowdery was attempting to translate and write scripture in a revelatory manner.

v7 The Lord indicates Cowdery was not willing to make the investment required, but rather simply wanted the benefits without the work. We don't just ask for something and then get it, the Lord wants us to work for it. He is perfectly willing to work with us, but He is not going to magically grant something without requiring individual effort. To do so would rob us of the experience, as well as turn prayer into a selfish act of dictation.

v8-9 These verses are commonly used in the LDS Church as a description of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and rightly so. It is important to note the manifestations described here have both a spiritual and intellectual aspect (objective) as well as an emotional aspect (subjective), which affect both the thoughts and desires of the recipient.

In using this passage we should be careful to discern between the objective manifestations of the Spirit (i.e., the Holy Spirit manifesting something to the individual) and the subjective response of the individual (i.e., how the individual

feels about and responds to the Holy Spirit manifesting something to the individual). The risk to the individual is to assume the subjective response is indicative of revelation, which may not necessarily be the case. As a simplified example, consider that if a person feels the Spirit and then weeps, the person might think any time they weep they are feeling the Spirit. This is obviously not the case as weeping can be caused by many things, both objective and subjective.

The surest test is to adhere to the formula granted. The individual deliberately ponders over some matter and then seeks validation from the Lord. If the Spirit ratifies it, then there is intellectual and spiritual enlightenment. If the Spirit does not ratify it, then there is no intellectual or spiritual enlightenment, there is stupor instead. If a person has an experience that seems similar to a manifestation of the Spirit, but there is no intellectual and spiritual enlightenment attending it, then it is simply a subjective experience and not an objective manifestation of the Spirit.

v8 "bosom", or the heart, the poetical seat of one's desires, cf. D&C 8:2.

v9 "you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me", the Lord indicates He is the One that gives His servants the Scriptures. Without His assistance and endorsement, what they would write would not be sacred or inspired.

v11-14 When Cowdery originally asked for the gift of translation it would have been a good thing for him to assist Smith in the process (v. 11), but the Lord has since given Smith greater ability to make up for the lack of help (v. 12). He then informs Cowdery that He is not upset with him and has not jeopardized his standing with Him over the matter (v. 13-14).

Initially, the Lord felt it was good for Smith to have help translating, presumably to speed the work and give Smith greater freedom in his other labors¹¹ Behold, it was expedient when you commenced; but you feared, and the time is past, and it is not expedient now; 12 For, do you not behold that I have given unto my servant Joseph sufficient strength, whereby it is made up? And neither of you have I condemned. 13 Do this thing which I have commanded you, and you shall prosper. Be faithful, and yield to no temptation. 14 Stand fast in the work wherewith I have called you, and a hair of your head shall not be lost, and you shall be lifted up at the last day. Amen.

. But, now the time has passed and Smith has invested the

effort required, obtained the experience, his skill and strength has surpassed anything Cowdery could now accomplish in the mean time. So, it is simply more efficient for Smith to translate and Cowdery to write.

v12 This verse illustrates how interactive the Lord is with people in bringing about His works. Cowdery failed to follow through, so the Lord gave Smith additional strength to make up the difference. The Lord's will is not so inexorable that He is not willing to change things a bit for the benefit of His servants when the overall goal remains unaltered.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 9

There is no historical material available for this particular revelation. General comments on the subject are available in the comments on D&C 8. Unfortunately, we are left nonplused as to what efforts, if any, Cowdery made and if he successfully translated anything at all before giving up, and what specifically prompted the revelation. D&C 6 was given in April as was this revelation, so less than a month had passed between the two.

This revelation was first published in the Book of Commandments in 1833, and then in the Kirtland edition of the Doctrine & Covenants in 1835. It was subsequently published in the Times and Seasons, volume 3, number 18, page 854, July 15, 1842, and the Millennial Star, volume 3, number 8, page 135, December, 1842.

Copyright © 2025 by S. Kurt Neumiller <kurt.neumiller@gmail.com>. All rights reserved. No part of this text may be reproduced in any form or by any means for commercial gain without the express written consent of the author. Digital or printed copies may be freely made and distributed for personal and public non-commercial use.