

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 18

This revelation is primarily aimed at Oliver Cowdery. He is directly addressed in v. 1-25 and then he and David Whitmer are addressed in v. 26-47.

When reading this section it is common to focus mainly on the calling of the Twelve Apostles. However, this is not the main theme. They, including Cowdery and Whitmer and the Twelve, are called to proclaim repentance to "all men everywhere" (v. 9), "both unto Gentile and unto Jew" (v. 26). This is the underlying reason why the Twelve are called, and therefore the primary subject of this revelation.

This revelation preceded the formation of the Church by some nine months, and the formation of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles by almost six years. It is clear from the beginning the Lord had every intention of reconstituting the original ancient Church, and it was only a matter of man fulfilling the Lord's intentions. To us it seems the Church should be organized before the Twelve are called, but if we recall the ancient Church, Jesus called the Twelve well before the Church was organized as an entity after His crucifixion.

Joseph and Oliver had received the Melchizedek Priesthood by this point, as the available documentary evidence points to them receiving it before they left Harmony, PA for the Whitmer's house at Waterloo, NY late in March. As such, reconstituting the Quorum of the Twelve would have been within the realm of the possible from the point of view of having the necessary Priesthood keys.

1 Now, behold, because of the thing which you, my servant Oliver Cowdery, have desired to know of me, I give unto you these words: 2 Behold, I have manifested unto you, by my Spirit in many instances, that the things which you have written are true; wherefore you know that they are true. 3 And if you know that they are true, behold, I give unto you a commandment, that you rely upon the things which are written; 4 For in them are all things written concerning the foundation of my church, my gospel, and my rock. 5 wherefore, if you shall build up my church, upon the foundation of my gospel and my rock, the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.

v1-5 Knowledge of the veracity of the text requires the recipient to adhere to it. If you know something is true, you must act accordingly.

v2 Those being addressed have gone beyond faith regarding the

revelations they have received, they therefore "know" they are true, Alma 32:34.

v3 The logical conclusion of knowing something is true requires the one with the knowledge to adhere to it and act accordingly. In matters of religion, morality and ethics this requires one develop a godly walk, keep the commandments and so forth.

v5 This verse is derivative of the Matt. 7:24-27 parable and paraphrases Jesus' comments to Simon Peter in Matt. 16:18. Given the subsequent commissions documented in this section it is not surprising a similar statement given to a person in the same position historically (i.e., one of the Twelve) is repeated.

6 Behold, the world is ripening in iniquity; and it must needs be that the children of men are stirred up unto repentance, both the Gentiles and also the house of Israel. 7 wherefore, as thou hast been baptized by the hands of my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., according to that which I have commanded him, he hath fulfilled the thing which I commanded him. 8 And now, marvel not that I have called him unto mine own purpose, which purpose is known in me; wherefore, if he shall be diligent in keeping my commandments he shall be blessed unto eternal life; and his name is Joseph. 9 And now, Oliver Cowdery, I speak unto you, and also unto David Whitmer, by the way of commandment; for, behold, I command all men everywhere to repent, and I speak unto you, even as unto Paul mine apostle, for you are called even with that same calling with which he was called. 10 Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God; 11 For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him. 12 And he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance. 13 And how great is his joy in the soul that repenteth! 14 wherefore, you are called to cry repentance unto this people. 15 And if it so be that you should labor all your days in crying repentance unto this people, and bring, save it be one soul unto me, how great shall be your joy with him in the kingdom of my Father! 16 And now, if your joy will be great with one soul that you have brought unto me into the kingdom of my Father, how great will be your joy if you should bring many souls unto me!

v6-16 Cowdery is called and commissioned to preach repentance to the world as Paul did anciently.

v7-8 These verses appear to be a rather odd paraphrase on Smith's calling and obedience, indicating to Cowdery their

callings at this point in time were different. It suggests Cowdery was envious of Smith's position and/or activities.

v8 "his name is Joseph", the significance of which is explained in 2 Ne. 3:14-15.

v15-16 Repetition and emphasis on "great joy" over the repentant. Those who labor in bringing people to repentance share in the Father's joy.

17 Behold, you have my gospel before you, and my rock, and my salvation. 18 Ask the Father in my name, in faith believing that you shall receive, and you shall have the Holy Ghost, which manifesteth all things which are expedient unto the children of men. 19 And if you have not faith, hope, and charity, you can do nothing. 20 Contend against no church, save it be the church of the devil. 21 Take upon you the name of Christ, and speak the truth in soberness. 22 And as many as repent and are baptized in my name, which is Jesus Christ, and endure to the end, the same shall be saved. 23 Behold, Jesus Christ is the name which is given of the Father, and there is none other name given whereby man can be saved; 24 wherefore, all men must take upon them the name which is given of the Father, for in that name shall they be called at the last day; 25 wherefore, if they know not the name by which they are called, they cannot have place in the kingdom of my Father.

v17-25 A general exhortation to Cowdery attendant to the commission of v. 6-16.

v17 They have the "rock", they understand the gospel per v. 1-5.

v18 They are counseled to consult in prayer to receive guidance through the Holy Spirit, cp. D&C 46:28-30.

v19 Contrast this statement with that of D&C 4:5.

v20 "Contend", contention is prohibited and shown to be antithesis to the Lord's message and intent in D&C 10:63, 19:30. Also cp. 3 Ne. 11:29.

"no church, save it be the church of the devil", they are not to attack any sect in specific, but rather the evil things of the devil. Attacking any church in specific leads to nothing but contention, and the devil profits thereby. However, preaching against sin is an attack on the adversary's kingdom

which is permissible.

The manner in which the adversary weakens Christianity is by promoting sin within its ranks, by encouraging division based upon doctrinal differences, and by fostering contention between the various groups. We are to do away with sin and avoid contention. What defines a disciple of Christ is your walk (cf. John 13:35, John 15:8, Acts 11:26), not your doctrinal definitions or creedal statements.

v21-22 The messenger and the listener are to take the name of Jesus Christ upon them. With messengers this requires them to speak truth in soberness, and the listener is required to repent, be baptized and endure.

v23-25 These verses form a parenthesis which answers the question, "Why must we take Jesus' name upon us?"

26 And now, behold, there are others who are called to declare my gospel, both unto Gentile and unto Jew; 27 Yea, even twelve; and the Twelve shall be my disciples, and they shall take upon them my name; and the Twelve are they who shall desire to take upon them my name with full purpose of heart. 28 And if they desire to take upon them my name with full purpose of heart, they are called to go into all the world to preach my gospel unto every creature. 29 And they are they who are ordained of me to baptize in my name, according to that which is written; 30 And you have that which is written before you; wherefore, you must perform it according to the words which are written. 31 And now I speak unto you, the Twelve--Behold, my grace is sufficient for you; you must walk uprightly before me and sin not. 32 And, behold, you are they who are ordained of me to ordain priests and teachers; to declare my gospel, according to the power of the Holy Ghost which is in you, and according to the callings and gifts of God unto men; 33 And I, Jesus Christ, your Lord and your God, have spoken it. 34 These words are not of men nor of man, but of me; wherefore, you shall testify they are of me and not of man; 35 For it is my voice which speaketh them unto you; for they are given by my Spirit unto you, and by my power you can read them one to another; and save it were by my power you could not have them; 36 wherefore, you can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words.

v26-36 The commission of the Twelve. Similar in content to the New Testamanet accounts of the ancient apostle's commissions.

v31 "my grace is sufficient for you", this phrase is always used in conjunction with statements dealing with the weaknesses of a person either by self-confession or by divine observation, cp. 2

Cor. 12:9, Ether 12:26-27, Moroni 10:32, D&C 18:31. The general intent is for the Lord to indicate that the person's weaknesses are not such that their salvation is jeopardized by them at present. However, note after this statement is made, the Lord indicates that despite their weaknesses they are to maintain godly walks and to not deliberately sin.

v34 The Lord states plainly that these words are His own and not Smith's or any man's. This seems redundant given the Lord is speaking in the first-person. However, given the attitude among many contemporary Bible scholars, and even among some LDS persons, to assume the text is not what it presents itself to be, we can see it is necessary for the Lord to clarify His position. Such a statement forces any other conclusion to flatly contradict what the Lord Himself says on the matter.

37 And now, behold, I give unto you, Oliver Cowdery, and also unto David Whitmer, that you shall search out the Twelve, who shall have the desires of which I have spoken; 38 And by their desires and their works you shall know them. 39 And when you have found them you shall show these things unto them. 40 And you shall fall down and worship the Father in my name.

v37-40 Cowdery and Whitmer are commissioned to find and assemble the Twelve.

v38 The ancient formula for the means of obtaining a righteous judgement, cp. Matt. 7:16-20.

41 And you must preach unto the world, saying: You must repent and be baptized, in the name of Jesus Christ; 42 For all men must repent and be baptized, and not only men, but women, and children who have arrived at the years of accountability. 43 And now, after that you have received this, you must keep my commandments in all things; 44 And by your hands I will work a marvelous work among the children of men, unto the convincing of many of their sins, that they may come unto repentance, and that they may come unto the kingdom of my Father. 45 Wherefore, the blessings which I give unto you are above all things. 46 And after that you have received this, if you keep not my commandments you cannot be saved in the kingdom of my Father. 47 Behold, I, Jesus Christ, your Lord and your God, and your Redeemer, by the power of my Spirit have spoken it. Amen.

v41-46 These verses close off the section with a general exhortation aimed at the newly called Cowdery and Whitmer, and presumably to the Twelve as well. The text is arranged as a double repetition of the themes from the preceding text:

- A - (v. 41-42) Preach repentance, repeats v. 6-16.
- B - (v. 43) Keep my commandments, repeats v. 1-5
- A - (v. 44-45) Bring them to repentance.
- B - (v. 46) Keep my commandments.

v47 An emphatic authority statement repeating and emphasizing the idea of v. 34.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 18

After this revelation about nine months pass before the next documented revelation is given, cf. D&C 19. During these nine months, between June 1829 and March 1830, printing of the Book of Mormon is undertaken and completed. While Smith comments very little on the events of these nine months in his History, his mother comments on some of the more noteworthy events in chapters 31-32 of her History of Joseph Smith by His Mother.

This section was first published in the Book of Commandments in 1833 on pages 34-39, then in the Doctrine & Covenants in 1835 on pages 172-174. It was published in Times & Seasons, volume 3, number 22, pages 915-917, dated September 15, 1842 and in The Millennial Star, volume 4, number 7, pages 100-101, dated November, 1843.

Excerpt from History of the Church

We now became anxious to have that promise realized to us, which the angel that conferred upon us the Aaronic Priesthood had given us, viz., that provided we continued faithful, we should also have the Melchizedek Priesthood, which holds the authority of the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost. We had for some time made this matter a subject of humble prayer, and at length we got together in the chamber of Mr. Whitmer's house, in order more particularly to seek of the Lord what we now so earnestly desired; and here, to our unspeakable satisfaction, did we realize the truth of the Savior's promise—"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you"—for we had not long been engaged in solemn and fervent prayer, when the word of the Lord came unto us in the chamber, commanding us that I should ordain Oliver Cowdery to be an Elder in the Church of Jesus Christ; and that he also should ordain me to the same office; and then to ordain others, as it should be made known unto us from time to time. We were, however, commanded to defer this our ordination until such times as it should be practicable to have our brethren, who had been and who should be baptized, assembled together, when we must have their sanction to our thus proceeding to ordain each other, and have them decide by vote whether they were willing to accept us as spiritual teachers or not; when also we were commanded to bless bread and break it with them, and to take wine, bless it, and drink it with them;

afterward proceed to ordain each other according to commandment; then call out such men as the Spirit should dictate, and ordain them; and then attend to the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost, upon all those whom we had previously baptized, doing all things in the name of the Lord. The following commandment will further illustrate the nature of our calling to this Priesthood, as well as that of others who were yet to be sought after:

[text of D&C 18 follows]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, pages 60-62)

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