

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 23

The Lord addresses five different people, each with a brief comment.

Note the first four people addressed have all been baptized and are told they are "under no condemnation", whereas the unbaptized Knight receives no such statement. The phrase "under no condemnation" is elsewhere used only once, appearing in Moroni 8:22. There, it is used to describe little children and those who are without the law as being redeemed as they have nothing to repent of. Thus, the Lord is saying these four recently baptized individuals are presently forgiven of their sins even as a child would be.

1 Behold, I speak unto you, Oliver, a few words. Behold, thou art blessed, and art under no condemnation. But beware of pride, lest thou shouldst enter into temptation. 2 Make known thy calling unto the church, and also before the world, and thy heart shall be opened to preach the truth from henceforth and forever. Amen.

v1 "beware of pride", regarding this, Smith and Sjodahl comment as follows:

Oliver Cowdery was highly favored by the Lord. He was one of the first six members of the Church. He was an Elder and an Apostle. He was the first messenger to the world from the Church. He took a leading part in the affairs of the Church. On the 18th of December, 1833, when the printing press was dedicated at Kirtland, the Prophet Joseph recorded the following: "Blessed of the Lord is Brother Oliver; nevertheless, there are two evils in him that he must needs forsake, or he cannot altogether forsake [escape?] the buffetings of the adversary. If he forsake these evils, he shall be forgiven, and shall be made like unto the bow which the Lord hath set in the heavens; he shall be a sign and an ensign unto the nations" (Historical Record, p. 199). What these two evils were the Prophet does not place on record. However, on the 11th of April, 1838, charges were preferred against him which show that pride and covetousness were the sins that beset him. He did not heed this Revelation warning him of pride, and the consequence was that he lost his membership in the Church. Later in life he became humble and returned to the Church. To the High Council that considered his application for

reinstatement, he said, "Brethren, for a number of years I have been separated from you. I now desire to come back. I wish to come humbly and to be one in your midst. I seek no station, I only wish to be identified with you." He was re-baptized (Historical Record, p. 201). (Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, Doctrine and Covenants Commentary, page 120)

3 Behold, I speak unto you, Hyrum, a few words; for thou also art under no condemnation, and thy heart is opened, and thy tongue loosed; and thy calling is to exhortation, and to strengthen the church continually. Wherefore thy duty is unto the church forever, and this because of thy family. Amen.

v3 In D&C 11:21 Hyrum is told to first obtain the gospel, and then his tongue would be loosed. Here, he is told he is ready to preach, so the call is extended. Hyrum's considerable zeal is commented on by the Lord in D&C 124:15. Hyrum's fate was to be martyred with his younger brother Joseph.

4 Behold, I speak a few words unto you, Samuel; for thou also art under no condemnation, and thy calling is to exhortation, and to strengthen the church; and thou art not as yet called to preach before the world. Amen.

v4 Samuel was baptized on the same day as was Joseph and Oliver in May of 1829, served as a missionary, and died faithful shortly after Joseph's and Hyrum's martyrdom.

Lucy Mack Smith records the final blessing Joseph Smith Sr. gave on his deathbed to Samuel:

"Samuel, you have been a faithful and obedient son. By your faithfulness you have brought many into the Church. The Lord has seen your diligence, and you are blessed, in that he has never chastised you, but has called you home to rest; and there is a crown laid up for you, which shall grow brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

"When the Lord called you, he said, 'Samuel, I have seen thy suffering, and heard thy cries, and beheld thy faithfulness; thy skirts are clear from the blood of this generation.' Because of these things I seal upon your head all the blessings which I have heretofore pronounced upon you; and this my dying blessing, I now seal upon you. Even so. Amen." (Lucy Mack Smith, History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, page 310)

Upon Samuel's death, the following appeared in Times & Seasons:

DIED In this city on the 30th ult., Elder SAMUEL H. SMITH, aged 36 years.

The exit of this worthy man, so soon after the horrible butchery of his brothers, Joseph and Hyrum in Carthage jail, is a matter of deep solemnity to the family, as well as a remediless loss to all. If ever there lived a good man upon the earth, Samuel H. Smith was that person; in fact he was too good for this generation, and the infinite wisdom of Jehovah seems to have been exerted in this instance of taking him, "to remove him from the evils to come." The highest point in the faith of the Latter Day Saints, is, that they know where they are going after death, and what they will do, and this gives a consolation more glorious than all the fame, honors and wealth, which the world has been able to heap upon her votaries or ever can: and so, when a faithful saint dies, like this, our lamented brother, calm, faithful and easy, all Israel whispers, as expectant of the same favor, "let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

His labors in the church from first to last, carrying glad tidings to the eastern cities; and finally his steadfastness as one of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon, and many saintly traits of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity, shall be given of him hereafter, as a man of God. (Times and Seasons, Vol. 5, No. 14, Aug. 1, 1844, pages 606-607)

5 Behold, I speak a few words unto you, Joseph; for thou also art under no condemnation, and thy calling also is to exhortation, and to strengthen the church; and this is thy duty from henceforth and forever. Amen.

v5 This verse addresses Joseph Sr, in a manner similar to that of Hyrum. He likewise was addressed in D&C 4. Joseph Sr. went on to be ordained to be the Patriarch for the Church, and acted in that capacity until his death.

6 Behold, I manifest unto you, Joseph Knight, by these words, that you must take up your

cross, in the which you must pray vocally before the world as well as in secret, and in your family, and among your friends, and in all places. 7 And, behold, it is your duty to unite with the true church, and give your language to exhortation continually, that you may receive the reward of the laborer. Amen.

v6 Knight was baptized the following June. See the comments on D&C 12 regarding Knight's character and involvement with Smith.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 23

Smith commented briefly on the different admonitions received for each of the requesting individuals:

The following persons being anxious to know of the Lord what might be their respective duties relation to this word, I enquired of the Lord, and received for them the following:

[text of D&C 23 follows]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, page 80)

From the statements in the text, it is plain the various revelations were received after the official formation of the church and the baptism of the individuals, obviously excepting Joseph Knight.

When this text was originally published in the Book of Commandments it appeared as five separate chapters (XVII-XXI), divided based upon the person being addressed. In the first edition of the Doctrine & Covenants and in History of the Church the passages were concatenated.

The text(s) were original published in the Book of Commandments in 1833, pages 43-45, then in the Kirtland Edition Doctrine & Covenants in 1835, pages 176-177. It was published in the Times & Seasons, volume 4, number 1, page 12, dated November 15, 1842. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 4, number 8, page 116, dated November, 1843.

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