

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 41

This section presents basic covenant theology wherein if you listen to the Lord and obey, then you are blessed. If you hear and do not obey, you are cursed. This is standard Old Testament covenant theology rhetoric, cp. Lev. 26, Deut 28. The issue at hand was the need to correct the recent converts to the Church concerning points of doctrine they had carried in from their prior religious experiences.

1 HEARKEN and hear, O ye my people, saith the Lord and your God, ye whom I delight to bless with the greatest of all blessings, ye that hear me; and ye that hear me not will I curse, that have professed my name, with the heaviest of all cursings.

2 Hearken, O ye elders of my church whom I have called, behold I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall assemble yourselves together to agree upon my word; 3 And by the prayer of your faith ye shall receive my law, that ye may know how to govern my church and have all things right before me. 4 And I will be your ruler when I come; and behold, I come quickly, and ye shall see that my law is kept. 5 He that receiveth my law and doeth it, the same is my disciple;

and he that saith he receiveth it and doeth it not, the same is not my disciple, and shall be cast out from among you; 6 For it is not meet that the things which belong to the children of the kingdom should be given to them that are not worthy, or to dogs, or the pearls to be cast before swine.

v1-6 The Lord will bless those who listen and curse those who will not listen (v. 1) when He tells them to be united in observing His laws (v. 2-4). Those who will not do this are not His disciples, and should not be treated as such (v. 5) as the things reserved for the members of the Church are not to be given to those who are not members (v. 6).

The text of these verses can be arranged by subject as follows:

A - (v. 1a-e) Ye that hear are blessed with greatest of blessings

B - (v. 1f-h) Them that do not hear receive the heaviest of curses

A - (v. 2-5b) The elders are to hear, receive, agree upon the Law and see that it is kept

B - (v. 5c-6) Those who receive and do not do the Law are not disciples and are to be cast out

v2 "agree", the KJV translates two different Greek words in the New Testament to the English "agree". In Matt. 5:25 the Greek

"eunoeo", most literally translated "well-mind", is rendered to "make friends" by the New American Standard (NAS) and "humor" by the Concordant Literal New Testament (CLNT). In Matt. 18:19 the Greek "sumphoneo", most literally translated "together-sound", is rendered "agree" by the NAS and "agree" by the CLNT. This Greek term "sumphoneo" also appears in Matt. 20:2, 13, Luke 5:36, Acts 5:9, Acts 15:15. The context of v. 2 indicates the elders should be united upon the word of the Lord, thus the latter Greek term "sumphoneo" and its uses in the NT correlate with this usage.

v3 Compare D&C 46:28-30, D&C 50:29.

v4 This verse clearly presents ruler and servant imagery with the Lord as King instructing His vassals in their responsibilities.

v6 A paraphrase of Matt. 15:26 and Matt. 7:6. It is interesting to note in Matt. 15 the context is a Gentile woman being rebuffed in favor of ministry to natural Israel. However, in the present contemporary quote the gospel is delivered to the Gentiles so those who are the dogs/swine are the deliberately rebellious and unrepentant. This follows with the Old Testament record of why Israel was separated from the nations, as they more rebellious and wicked, cp. Lev. 18:24-26, Lev. 20:22-24, Deut. 9:5. The only substantive change is the lineage-based differentiations.

7 And again, it is meet that my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., should have a house built, in which to live and translate. 8 And again, it is meet that my servant Sidney Rigdon should live as seemeth him good, inasmuch as he keepeth my commandments. 9 And again, I have called my servant Edward Partridge; and I give a commandment, that he should be appointed by the voice of the church, and ordained a bishop unto the church, to leave his merchandise and to spend all his time in the labors of the church; 10 To see to all things as it shall be appointed unto him in my laws in the day that I shall give them. 11 And this because his heart is pure before me, for he is like unto Nathanael of old, in whom there is no guile.

v7-11 Various specific statements of Church governance regarding Joseph Smith (v. 7), Sidney Rigdon (v. 8), and Edward Partridge (v. 9-11).

12 These words are given unto you, and they are pure before me; wherefore, beware how you hold them, for they are to be answered upon your souls in the day of judgment. Even so. Amen.

v12 A stern conclusion endorsing these commands as the Lord's own, insisting His people are responsible for them.

"pure before me", cp. Ps. 12:6 and especially the JST/IV on Ps. 12:6.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 41

Previous to the restored gospel being preached and the members converted, some of the people had attempted to practice a form of the Law of Consecration, as presented in Acts 4:32. However, the attempt was less than perfect, and resulted in problems.

Additionally, some local personalities were leading the believers astray:

In order to understand this Revelation, it may be well to recall the conditions that existed. There was, for instance, a society, sometimes called the Morley Family, because located on the farm of Isaac Morley. They had been baptized, but knew very little about the gospel. "Black Pete," a negro, was their "revelator." They claimed to see angels and to receive letters from heaven. There was one Wycom Clark, who claimed to be a revelator, and he organized "The Pure Church." (Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, Doctrine & Covenants Commentary, section 42)

Mark Lyman Staker, in his Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith's Ohio Revelations discusses the influence of Black Pete and other local religious influences on those who lived at Kirtland before they joined the Church in chapters 1-3.

Section 41 was first published in 1833 in the Book of Commandments, pages 88-89. It was then published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, pages 188-189. It was published in Time and Seasons in volume 4, number 24, page 368, dated November 1, 1843. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 5, number 4, page 49, dated September, 1844.

Excerpt from History of the Church

The latter part of January, in company with Brothers Sidney Rigdon and Edward Partridge, I started with my wife for Kirtland, Ohio, where we arrived about the first of February, and were kindly received and welcomed into the house of Brother Newel K. Whitney. My wife and I lived in the family of Brother Whitney several weeks, and received every kindness and attention

which could be expected, and especially from Sister Whitney.

The branch of the Church in this part of the Lord's vineyard, which had increased to nearly one hundred members, were striving to do the will of God, so far as they knew it, though some strange notions and false spirits had crept in among them. With a little caution and some wisdom, I soon assisted the brethren and sisters to overcome them. The plan of "common stock," which had existed in what was called "the family," [Footnote: This organization, called "the family," came into existence before the Gospel was preached in Kirtland, through an effort of the people of this neighborhood to live as the early Christians are said to have lived, viz., "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common."-(Acts iv: 32.)] whose members generally had embraced the everlasting Gospel, was readily abandoned for the more perfect law of the Lord; and the false spirits were easily discerned and rejected by the light of revelation.

The Lord gave unto the Church the following:

[text of D&C 41 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, Vol. 1, pages 146-147)

Excerpt from Book of John Whitmer

About these days Joseph and Sidney arrived at Kirtland to the joy and satisfaction of the Saints. The disciples had all things common, and were going to destruction very fast as to temporal things; for they considered from reading the scripture that what belonged to a brother, belonged to any of the brethren. Therefore they would take each other's clothes and other property and use it without leave which brought on confusion and disappointments, for they did not understand the scripture. After Joseph lived there a few days the word of the Lord came saying:

[text of D&C 41 quoted]

(John Whitmer, Book of John Whitmer, chapter 2, paragraph 1)

Excerpt from Journal of Discourses

There was at this time in Kirtland, a society that had undertaken to have a community of property; it has sometimes been denominated the Morley family, as there was a number of them located on a farm owned by Captain Isaac Morley. These

persons had been baptized, but had not yet been instructed in relation to their duties. A false spirit entered into them, developing their singular, extravagant and wild ideas. They had a meeting at the farm, and among them was a negro known generally as Black Pete, who became a revelator. Others also manifested wonderful developments; they could see angels, and letters would come down from heaven, they said, and they would be put through wonderful unnatural distortions. Finally on one occasion, Black Pete got sight of one of those revelations carried by a black angel, he started after it, and ran off a steep wash bank twenty-five feet high, passed through a tree top into the Chagrin river beneath. He came out with a few scratches, and his ardor somewhat cooled.

Joseph Smith came to Kirtland, and taught that people in relation to their error. He showed them that the Spirit of God did not bind men nor make them insane, and that the power of the adversary which had been manifested in many instances was visible even from that cause, for persons under its influence became helpless, and were bound hand and foot as in chains, being as immovable as a stick of timber. When Joseph came to instruct these Saints in relation to the true Spirit, and the manner of determining the one from the other, in a short time a number of those who had been influenced by those foul manifestations, apostatized. Among the number was Wycom Clark; he got a revelation that he was to be the prophet--that he was the true revelator; and himself, Northrop Sweet and four other individuals retired from the Church, and organized the "Pure Church of Christ," as they called it, composed of six members, and commenced having meetings, and preaching, but that was the extent of the growth of his early schism. John Noah, another of this class, assumed to be a prophet, and in consequence thereof was expelled from the church. (George A. Smith, Journal of Discourses, Vol. 11, pages 3-4, November 15, 1864)

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