

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 44

The Lord calls the missionaries formerly sent abroad to return and gather for a conference at Kirtland.

1 Behold, thus saith the Lord unto you my servants, it is expedient in me that the elders of my church should be called together, from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, by letter or some other way.

2 And it shall come to pass, that inasmuch as they are faithful, and exercise faith in me, I will pour out my Spirit upon them in the day that they assemble themselves together. 3 And it shall come to pass that they shall go forth into the regions round about, and preach repentance unto the people. 4 And many shall be converted, insomuch that ye shall obtain power to organize yourselves according to the laws of man; 5 That your enemies may not have power over you; that you may be preserved in all things; that you may be enabled to keep my laws; that every bond may be broken wherewith the enemy seeketh to destroy my people. 6 Behold, I say unto you, that ye must visit the poor and the needy and administer to their relief, that they may be kept until all things may be done according to my law which ye have received. Amen.

v1 Formerly sent out in D&C 42:63, they are summoned back.

v2 This verse recounts the statements in D&C 43:15-16.

v3 After the conference they are to return to proselyting.

v4-5 The members of the church are to organize themselves according to the laws of man so those opposed to the church will have no hold on them.

It seems curious the Lord would care about the Church abiding the laws of the land, since they are man's law. That the Lord wants them to do it so as to leave their enemies without excuse seems a good reason why. However, if the failure to abide the laws of the land could create a bad example that would put people off, even if it was only superficially "bad". It would give their enemies fuel for hateful rhetoric that might dissuade honest persons. It could also be seen as being hostile to gentile nations, and therefore be perceived as some insurgent anti-government movement, even if it wasn't.

The command probably has more to do with avoiding the appearances of evil than anything else. Even if temporal laws are non-binding as far as God is concerned, it is overall counterproductive to create contention over something that isn't important.

v5-6 A paraphrase Isa. 58:6-7, in a somewhat different context.

v6 An admonition to care for those in need, cp. D&C 42:30-52.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 44

The revelation calling a conference was received in February 1831, and the conference was held the following June. D&C 52 is a revelation received at the June conference. Robert J. Woodford, in his Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants states on page 584:

The Lord had revealed in Section 20 that conferences should be held quarterly in the Church, but up to this point they were not being conducted on a regular basis. In New York, each conference was scheduled at the conclusion of the one preceding it, but with the impending journey to Ohio, no meeting was called for in the conference of January 2, 1831. Therefore, the Lord directed the Prophet by revelation when the next conference was to be held.

The section was first published in the Book of Commandments in 1833, pages 100-101. It was then published in the Kirtland edition Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, pages 189-190. It was published in Times and Seasons, volume 5, number 1, page 385, dated January 1, 1844. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 5, number 5, pages 66-67, dated October, 1844.

Excerpt from History of the Church

The latter part of February I received the following revelation, which caused the Church to appoint a conference to be held early in the month of June ensuing:

[text of D&C 44 quoted]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, pages 157)

Excerpt from Doctrine & Covenants Commentary

In the latter part of February, 1831, the Lord directed that the missionaries who had gone to the Various parts of the Country be summoned to Kirtland to meet in a general Conference. Three Conferences had been held before, viz., one on June 9th, 1830; one on September 26th, the same year, and one on January 2nd, 1831. These were all held at Fayette, N.Y. The Conference referred to in this Revelation convened at Kirtland, June 3rd, 1831. It was the Fourth General Conference of the Church, and the first gathering of its kind in Kirtland. (Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, Doctrine and Covenants Commentary, section 44)

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