

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 46

This section informs the early church how they should conduct their meetings. It starts with mundane matters of policy regarding Church meetings (v. 3-6), but turns to spiritual matters (v. 7-33).

Note how little text is dedicated to the actual issue of who is and who isn't allowed to attend the meetings as compared to the ideally spiritual nature of the meetings and the attendees.

The text can be outlined as follows:

- Introduction (v.1-2)
- Policy regarding who may attend meetings (v. 3-6)
- Gifts which may be manifested at Church Meetings (v. 7-27)
 - Gifts for the ecclesia, but beware (v. 7-9)
 - Different distributions of gifts (v. 10-16)
 - Different gifts (v. 17-26)
 - Bishop is to discern legitimate gifts (v. 27)
- Do all things in Spirit (v. 28-33)

1 Hearken, O ye people of my church; for verily I say unto you that these things were spoken unto you for your profit and learning. 2 But notwithstanding those things which are written, it always has been given to the elders of my church from the beginning, and ever shall be, to conduct all meetings as they are directed and guided by the Holy Spirit.

v1-2 Introduction. Verse 1 informs the members of the church the things which have been written in Scripture are for their benefit (v. 1). However, the leaders of the church are to lead the church as the Spirit dictates (v. 2)

v2 The meaning of the phrase "notwithstanding those things which are written" is explained by B. H. Roberts:

Now, reading this revelation in the Doctrine & Covenants no understanding can be had from it as to what "things" are referred to in this opening paragraph, that are "spoken for your profit and learning, "but when we learn, as we do from the footnote (p. 163, Vol. 1, Church History) that "in the beginning of the Church, while yet in her infancy, the disciples used to exclude unbelievers, which caused some to marvel and converse of this matter because of the things written in the Book of Mormon" (III Nephi xvii: 22-34); wherein it is learned that the Nephite church was forbidden to exclude unbelievers from their Church gatherings, and sacramental meetings, whereupon it was thought and urged by some that the practice of

the Saints in Kirtland was contrary to the revealed will of the Lord respecting this matter; therefore the Saints took the passages from the Book of Mormon to the Prophet and desired to know the will of the Lord respecting this custom. "Therefore the Lord deigned to speak on this subject, that his people might come to understanding, and said that he had always given to his Elders to conduct all meetings as they were led by the Spirit." (History of the Church, note, p. 163.) Knowing these circumstances the whole matter becomes perfectly plain. We know what is meant when the revelation starts out by saying, "These things were spoken unto you for your profit and learning," etc. As it is in this case so it is in many others, the clear understanding of the revelation depends on knowing the circumstances which called forth the revelation. (B.H. Roberts, The Seventy's Course in Theology, p.146)

3 Nevertheless ye are commanded never to cast any one out from your public meetings, which are held before the world. 4 Ye are also commanded not to cast any one who belongeth to the church out of your sacrament meetings; nevertheless, if any have trespassed, let him not partake until he makes reconciliation. 5 And again I say unto you, ye shall not cast any out of your sacrament meetings who are earnestly seeking the kingdom--I speak this concerning those who are not of the church. 6 And again I say unto you, concerning your confirmation meetings, that if there be any that are not of the church, that are earnestly seeking after the kingdom, ye shall not cast them out.

v3-6 Policies regarding who may attend meetings. The statements are similar to those found in 2 Ne. 26:25-33 and 3 Ne. 18:22-34. Verses 3 and 5-6 deal with non-members who are honestly interested, and v. 4 deals with members who have committed offenses but not to the point of expulsion (cf. D&C 42:74-93).

v4 In the case of those who are members who have "trespassed", what does "trespass" mean? In the KJV the Greek term "paraptoma", most literally translated to "beside-fall" meaning "that which wounds the feelings", is rendered "fall" twice, "fault" twice, "offence" 7 times, "sin" 3 times, and "trespass" 9 times. Compare Matt 6:14, Rom. 4:25, Eph. 2:1, Colos. 2:13. This suggests the term "trespass" has general application to anything from interpersonal offenses to serious commandment breaking. For those who do cause offenses, they need to be reconciled following the instructions in D&C 42:88-92.

7 But ye are commanded in all things to ask of God, who giveth liberally; and that which the Spirit testifies unto you even so I

would that ye should do in all holiness of heart, walking uprightly before me, considering the end of your salvation, doing all things with prayer and thanksgiving, that ye may not be seduced by evil spirits, or doctrines of devils, or the commandments of men; for some are of men, and others of devils. 8 wherefore, beware lest ye are deceived; and that ye may not be deceived seek ye earnestly the best gifts, always remembering for what they are given; 9 For verily I say unto you, they are given for the benefit of those who love me and keep all my commandments, and him that seeketh so to do; that all may be benefited that seek or that ask of me, that ask and not for a sign that they may consume it upon their lusts.

v7-27 Spiritual gifts which may be manifested at meetings. This text endorses the OT, NT (cf. 1 Cor. 12) and BofM (cf. Moroni 10) position that spiritual gifts will be had among the ecclesia of God.

v7-9 There are gifts for the ecclesia, but beware of false spirits. In v. 7 the Lord commands the ecclesia to ask Him for spiritual gifts and blessings, because He is a generous giver. The Church is to receive these gifts thankfully and maintain a godly and just walk so that they may not fall prey to evil spirits or false doctrines. Verse 8 continues the warning against deception by stating that the ecclesia should seek after the best, i.e. spiritual, gifts and understand what their purpose is. Verse 9 then goes on to explain the purpose of these spiritual gifts is primarily for the benefit of the ecclesia, and not the individual. Spiritual gifts are given so the individual may be of service to the ecclesia, and not that the individual may "consume it upon their lusts" (i.e., indulging in self-gratification). This is the purpose of the elect, cp. v. 29, Mosiah 8:18, Moroni 7:31, D&C 29:4, D&C 93:46.

To summarize, spiritual gifts are imparted to individuals for the benefit of the ecclesia, and if the person with gift becomes prideful and uses the gift for self-promotion they will end up deceived by the adversary.

This warning against false spirits and deceiving men serves to warn the ecclesia that not all manifestations or mystical things are automatically of God, cp. D&C 50. The adversary and self-promoting men are out there and willing to deceive people using false signs and mystical trickery. The best way to expose fraud and clear yourself of it is simply to maintain pure desires, a godly walk, pray over things, and considering the "end of your salvation" (i.e., a warning that the ends do not justify the means). If anyone or anything comes to you advocating behavior that is contrary to that of a godly walk, then you know it is false, cp. v. 28-33.

10 And again, verily I say unto you, I would that ye should always remember, and always retain in your minds what those gifts are, that are given unto the church. 11 For all have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God. 12 To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby. 13 To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world. 14 To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have eternal life if they continue faithful. 15 And again, to some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know the differences of administration, as it will be pleasing unto the same Lord, according as the Lord will, suiting his mercies according to the conditions of the children of men. 16 And again, it is given by the Holy Ghost to some to know the diversities of operations, whether they be of God, that the manifestations of the Spirit may be given to every man to profit withal.

v10-16 Spiritual gifts are distributed and applied differently. Different people have different gifts and talents, and they are all for the benefit of the ecclesia first, not the individual.

v15 "differences of administration", a paraphrase of Moroni 10:8.

v16 "diversities of operations", a paraphrase of 1 Cor. 12:6, a better translation of which would be "different apportionments of God's strength". See also Ps. 28:5.

17 And again, verily I say unto you, to some is given, by the Spirit of God, the word of wisdom. 18 To another is given the word of knowledge, that all may be taught to be wise and to have knowledge. 19 And again, to some it is given to have faith to be healed; 20 And to others it is given to have faith to heal. 21 And again, to some is given the working of miracles; 22 And to others it is given to prophesy; 23 And to others the discerning of spirits. 24 And again, it is given to some to speak with tongues; 25 And to another is given the interpretation of tongues. 26 And all these gifts come from God, for the benefit of the children of God.

27 And unto the bishop of the church, and unto such as God shall appoint and ordain to watch over the church and to be elders unto the church, are to have it given unto them to discern all those gifts lest there shall be any among you professing and yet be not of God.

v17-26 Details on some different gifts. The present list is similar to those appearing in 1 Cor. 12 and Moroni 10.

v26 This verse states for the third time the gifts are for the benefit of the ecclesia, cp. v. 8 and v. 12. And see v. 29 for

another repetition of this. The Lord wants to make it very clear what these gifts are for.

v27 Bishops and Church leaders are given a particular gift, attendant to their calling, to discern legitimate spiritual gifts so as to keep false spirits out of the Church, cp. 7-8. Leaders of the Church ideally have the gift of discernment and spiritual insights concerning their stewardship so what is best for those whom they preside over is perceived and done.

28 And it shall come to pass that he that asketh in Spirit shall receive in Spirit; 29 That unto some it may be given to have all those gifts, that there may be a head, in order that every member may be profited thereby. 30 He that asketh in the Spirit asketh according to the will of God; wherefore it is done even as he asketh. 31 And again, I say unto you, all things must be done in the name of Christ, whatsoever you do in the Spirit; 32 And ye must give thanks unto God in the Spirit for whatsoever blessing ye are blessed with. 33 And ye must practise virtue and holiness before me continually. Even so. Amen.

v28-33 Do all things in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Picking up on the theme of v. 7 to "ask God, who giveth liberally", these verses expound on what it means to have the Spirit indwelling in general and how to avoid the pitfalls of mentioned in the end of v. 7 in specific.

Those who ask "in Spirit" are those who are living such that they know what to ask for because what to ask for is revealed to them by the Spirit. Compare D&C 18:18, D&C 50:29, D&C 68:3-4, and note Nephi was like this, cf. Hela. 10:5-6. If a person "asketh according to the will of God" (v. 30), does all things "in the name of God" (v. 31), "give[s] thanks unto God in the Spirit" (v. 32), and "practice[s] virtue and holiness...continually" then they shall not be deceived by false spirits or cunning men as the end of v. 7 warns against.

Being "in the Spirit" isn't some mystical experience. It means your walk and desires are reconciled to God's so the Spirit is able to abide with you continually. If it abides with you continually and you listen to it, and do what it says, you will be under its guidance and "in" the Spirit.

v31 "in the name of Christ", i.e. the Priesthood, cp. 3 Ne. 11:25.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 46

Excerpt from The Book of John Whitmer

In the beginning of the Church, while yet in her infancy, the disciples used to exclude unbelievers, which caused some to marvel, and converse of this matter because of the things that are written in the Book of Mormon. Therefore the Lord deigned to speak on this subject, that his people might come to understanding and said that he had always given to his elders to conduct all meetings as they were led by the Spirit.

[text of D&C 46 quoted]

(John Whitmer, The Book of John Whitmer, chapter 4, paragraph 2)

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