

General Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 67-70

These sections are related in time and subject, all being received during a series of meetings forming a conference of the leaders of the Church discussing the publication of the revelations received to date into the Book of Commandments.

Comments on Doctrine & Covenants 67

Some of the Elders present at a pre-production meeting for the Book of Commandments express concern over the language used to compose them. The Lord makes it clear to them that substance is more important than style, all the while ironically demonstrating that He has [plenty of style](#) (especially see the footnotes).

1 BEHOLD and hearken, O ye elders of my church, who have assembled yourselves together, whose prayers I have heard, and whose hearts I know, and whose desires have come up before me. 2 Behold and lo, mine eyes are upon you, and the heavens and the earth are in mine hands, and the riches of eternity are mine to give. 3 Ye endeavored to believe that ye should receive the blessing which was offered unto you; but behold, verily I say unto you there were fears in your hearts, and verily this is the reason that ye did not receive.

v1-3 The Lord addresses the gathered Elders (v. 1) with an authority statement (v. 2) and admonitions to abandon their fear of men, which is limiting their heavenly blessings (v. 3).

v2 "fears in your hearts", those referenced in v. 10.

v3 The group in question is trying to balance their fear of the Lord with their fear of men. The Lord tells them doing so results in them limiting the flow of blessings the Lord would bestow on them. Their concerns over being accepted by the world appears to have weakened their convictions.

4 And now I, the Lord, give unto you a testimony of the truth of these commandments which are lying before you. 5 Your eyes have been upon my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., and his language you have known, and his imperfections you have known; and you have sought in your hearts knowledge that you might express beyond his language; this you also know.

v4-5 The Lord endorses the truth of the revelations as they are presently composed (v. 4), notwithstanding the relative humanity of Smith. The Lord identifies the underlying issue of the Elder's desire to establish themselves as more eloquent than he

(v. 5) .

6 Now, seek ye out of the Book of Commandments, even the least that is among them, and appoint him that is the most wise among you; 7 Or, if there be any among you that shall make one like unto it, then ye are justified in saying that ye do not know that they are true; 8 But if ye cannot make one like unto it, ye are under condemnation if ye do not bear record that they are true. 9 For ye know that there is no unrighteousness in them, and that which is righteous cometh down from above, from the Father of lights.

v6-9 The Lord challenges the Elders to produce writing of their own that is comparable to the revelations laid before them.

The issue the Lord addresses here is content (v. 9) versus style. The Elders in question are concerned about Smith's writing skills, and the Lord is admonishing them to be concerned about doctrinal and spiritual content.

v6-7 The very content of the forthcoming Book of Commandments is evidence in and of itself of its inspired nature (v. 6). The inability of man to produce anything comparable proved that they did not have an excuse to not believe in their veracity (v. 7).

The fact that no rival books of scripture have manifested themselves in contrast to the Book of Mormon or the Doctrine and Covenants, indicates man's inability to produce such documents without the assistance of God. Had they simply been a fabrication by Smith, someone better educated and more clever than Smith surely would have fabricated something to rival it.

10 And again, verily I say unto you that it is your privilege, and a promise I give unto you that have been ordained unto this ministry, that inasmuch as you strip yourselves from jealousies and fears, and humble yourselves before me, for ye are not sufficiently humble, the veil shall be rent and you shall see me and know that I am--not with the carnal neither natural mind, but with the spiritual. 11 For no man has seen God at any time in the flesh, except quickened by the Spirit of God. 12 Neither can any natural man abide the presence of God, neither after the carnal mind. 13 Ye are not able to abide the presence of God now, neither the ministering of angels; wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected. 14 Let not your minds turn back; and when ye are worthy, in mine own due time, ye shall see and know that which was conferred upon you by the hands of my servant Joseph Smith, Jun. Amen.

v10-14 The Lord tells the Elders that if they let go of their present worldly cares and fears then He will bless them extraordinary revelations (v. 10-13), even those received by Smith (v. 14).

v10 "fears", i.e., they fear man and not God, they are still

natural men per v. 12.

v11-12 These verses have deal with the subject of "seeing God's face". The phrase is based upon a Semitism where if a person's face was inclined towards you then you were in their favor. However, if they turned their face away from you or turned their back on you then you were out of their favor. This is the same Semitism applied throughout all of the scriptures in describing God's relationship with man. Only those quickened, or born again, by the Spirit are those who will enjoy God's presence. Compare Exod. 33:20, Deut. 31:17-18, 2 Chron. 7:14, Isa. 54:8, Jer. 18:7, Hosea 5:15, Ps. 27:8-9, 1 Peter 3:12.

Historical Material Pertaining to Doctrine & Covenants 67

It is easy to fault McLellin for his involvement in these events, particularly given his later apostasy. However, in D&C 68 he is labeled as "one of the faithful elders of my Church". Thus, it possible McLellin was selected given his education and profession as a schoolteacher (given v. 6). Had his intentions at this point been to discredit Smith, it seems unlikely the Lord would call him a "faithful elder" shortly thereafter. McLellin had only first met Smith a week beforehand, and by his own account was very favorably impressed with him.

It is likely the controversy was simply the suggestion that someone edit the revelations for rhetorical style and flourish prior to their publication (given v. 5), as opposed to their legitimacy being questioned.

This revelation was first published in the Kirtland edition of the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835, pages 151-152. It was published in Times and Seasons, volume 5, number 8, page 496, dated April 15, 1844. It was published in the Millennial Star, volume 5, number 12, page 185, dated May, 1845.

Excerpt from History of the Church

After this revelation [D&C 1] was received, some conversation was had concerning revelations and language. I received the following:

[text of D&C 67 quoted]

After the foregoing was received, William E. M'Lellin, as the wisest man, in his own estimation, having more learning than sense, endeavored to write a commandment like unto one of the least of the Lord's, but failed; it was an awful responsibility to write in the name of the Lord. The Elders and all present that witnessed this vain attempt of a man to imitate the language of Jesus Christ, renewed their faith in the fulness of the Gospel, and in the truth of the commandments and revelations which the Lord had given to the Church through my instrumentality; and the Elders signified a willingness to bear testimony of their truth to all the world. Accordingly I received the following:

The testimony of the witnesses to the book of the Lord's commandments, which He gave to His Church through Joseph Smith, Jun., who was appointed by the

voice of the Church for this purpose; we therefore feel willing to bear testimony to all the world of mankind, to every creature upon the face of all the earth and upon the islands of the sea, that the Lord has borne record to our souls, through the Holy Ghost, shed forth upon us, that these commandments were given by inspiration of God, and are profitable for all men, and are verily true. We give this testimony unto the world, the Lord being our helper; and it is through the grace of God, the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ, that we are permitted to have this privilege of bearing this testimony unto the world, that the children of men may be profited thereby.

[Footnote states: This "Testimony" to the truth of the "Book of Commandments" was doubtless drawn up with the intention of having it signed by the Elders present at the conference; but whether that was done or not does not appear in the Ms. of the Prophet's history. The testimony itself, however, is in the manuscript History. This is remarked because it has not been published heretofore in the History of the Prophet. The matter appears to stand thus: Each of the Elders present at the conference testified to the truth of the revelations then about to be published; and, as already seen (p. 222 note), expressed a willingness to testify to the truth of the revelations to all the world. Accordingly this testimony was prepared with the intention of having it signed and published in the "Book of Commandments." It may have been signed, too, and carried to Missouri, but owing to the fact that the printing press was destroyed by a mob before the "Book of Commandments" was all printed, the "Testimony" does not appear in the part of it that was printed. The names of the Elders present at this special conference, according to the minutes of it in the Far West Record (p. 15), are as follows: Joseph Smith, Jun., Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, John Whitmer, Peter Whitmer, Jun., Sidney Rigdon, William E. M'Lellin, Orson Hyde, Luke Johnson, Lyman E. Johnson.]

(Joseph Smith, History of the Church, volume 1, pages 224-226)

Excerpt from Doctrine and Covenants Commentary

A special conference was held at Hiram, Ohio, on the first day of November, 1831. Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer were

making preparations for the journey to Independence, where the Revelations received up to this time were to be published. and the brethren devoted a great deal of time to the consideration of this important undertaking. The conference authorized the printing of ten thousand copies under the title of the Book of Commandments. The Revelation contained in Section 1, and known as The Lord's Preface to the Book of Commandments (Sec. 1:6) was also received on this occasion. The Prophet asked what testimony those present were willing to bear to the Commandments. Several declared that they were willing to testify that they were of the Lord. On the second day of the Conference, Oliver Cowdery read The Lord's Preface, and then the brethren arose, and each in turn testified to the truth of all of the Revelations received (Hist. of the Church, Vol. I., p. 222).

However, there was not perfect harmony among the brethren. A few criticized the language found in some of the Revelations. They forgot that the spirit of God uses as they are, the instruments through which He communicates with man, just as an author, when writing, makes use of whatever pen, paper, and ink he may be able to obtain. They forgot that God calls to the prophetic office men as He finds them, be it behind the plough, among the sheep, in the royal courts, or the study of the scholar. (Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, Doctrine and Covenants Commentary, pages 403-404)

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