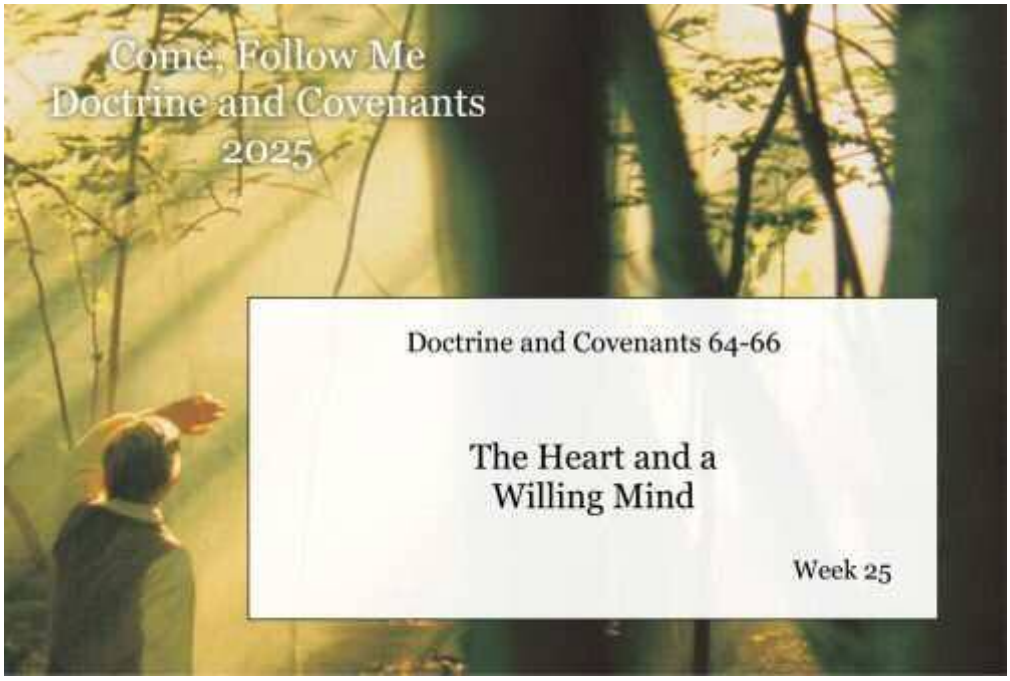

The Lord requires of us our heart and a willing mind. But to what end? What does He expect to create with them?

Explanation

The main topic I want to discuss this week is that of forgiveness. But I need to tell you that I have discovered that I have not been as forgiving as I ought to have been. This came as a surprise to me, for I have always thought of myself as a very forgiving person. So as I discuss forgiveness, please remember that I am still exploring this commandment, for I need to improve and be more forgiving. This is taking far more introspection than I anticipated, and I find this to be disturbing that this is so much more difficult than I ever anticipated it would be.

My first task is to condense section 64 into a more concise whole. The Lord moves from subject to subject, but does so by including principles of the gospel among his instructions. First I want to summarize the subjects being discussed and then follow up by talking about some of the principles embedded within those subjects. At the moment of this writing I am only planning on discussing section 64.

Summary of section 64

Just prior to this revelation being given the prophet and several of the brethren of the church were traveling from Missouri (Zion) back to their homes. It was August, and very hot, even for August. They had toiled to paddle canoes up the Missouri River and it was a dangerous and arduous effort. This river is very large and dangerous to navigate. There were many sawyers - floating and submerged logs - that threatened to capsize their canoes all along the length of their journey. The Missouri River is also known as the Big Muddy, because of how much sediment it carries each year. This makes it impossible to see below the surface of the water.

As the men struggled to survive on the water, their frustration and tempers flared, and some of the men became angry with the prophet. We don't have the details of their conversations, just that they parted from one another with resentments and ill feelings all around. Most of the men reconciled with each other, eventually, but one man left the church over the day's events. The Lord addresses this issue in the beginning of section 64.

Doctrine and Covenants 64:1-14 - The Lord tells us why He is merciful to these early leaders of the church. He admits that all of them, even the prophet, have sinned, but for their sakes He will forgive them. God warns us that we are commanded to forgive all men. Only He has the right to choose whom He will forgive.

Doctrine and Covenants 64:15-22 - Individuals are singled out and the Lord specifies what he has against each person and what they need to do to repair their standing before Him.

Doctrine and Covenants 64:23-43 - The Lord addresses the law of tithing, His commandment regarding who can move to Zion and when, and the principles behind the use of church funds, as well as the process of judging those who are not keeping the commandments in the church.

Forgiveness

Before I laden you with my comments on forgiveness, please read or listen to what Elder Jeffrey R. Holland said about it in his October, 2018 talk "The Ministry of Reconciliation". As usual, his thoughts are masterfully given.

The Lord begins this section with an interesting observation. He wants us to overcome the world, and to that end He will have compassion upon us.

> 2 For verily I say unto you, I will that ye should overcome the world; wherefore I will have compassion upon you.

Christ is speaking to the original leaders of the church. For His own glory, and for the salvation of their own souls, he has forgiven them their sins. Mind you they still needed to repent. The Lord never just dismisses wrongdoing to be self-serving.

> 3 There are those among you who have sinned; but verily I say, for this once, for mine own glory, and for the salvation of souls, I have forgiven you your sins.

God has given us his kingdom on earth, and therefore, I am assuming for the sake of his kingdom, and ultimately for our sakes, he will be merciful to us.

> 4 I will be merciful unto you, for I have given unto you the kingdom.

The men who traveled the river with Joseph had issues with him. Evidently they argued a lot that day. It appears that Joseph didn't come across as the most Christlike on that occasion, for there was a lot of offense on everyone's part, and everyone had to forgive each other the things that were said during their voyage up river.

> 5 And the keys of the mysteries of the kingdom shall not be taken from my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., through the means I have appointed, while he liveth, inasmuch as he obeyeth mine ordinances.
>
> 6 There are those who have sought occasion against him without cause;
>
> 7 Nevertheless, he has sinned; but verily I say unto you, I, the Lord, forgive sins unto those who confess their sins before me and ask forgiveness, who have not sinned unto death.

So the Lord is telling us that Joseph Smith may have sinned, but that he was being accused of sins he didn't commit. Anyone who sins then repents will be readily forgiven, as long as they "have not sinned unto death." I assume that means to sin so much that the person can no longer be influenced by the Holy Ghost. They are what the scriptures refer to as "past feeling" and no longer able to be helped by the Spirit. You have to sin a lot to get to this point. I dare say that no one reading this has sinned that much, so we are all able to be forgiven.

Here the Lord gives us an object lesson from his own time in mortality (Doctrine and Covenants 64:8-11).

> 8 My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened.

Did you catch the caveat there? He said they did not forgive one another in their hearts. That means they may have gone silent about someone's supposed offense, but they still held it against them in their heart. There was still resentment and mistrust. Christ calls this an "evil" and as such "they were afflicted and sorely chastened."

> 9 Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin.

What any of the Apostles did to offend or upset the others in the quorum was not the issue, for it was the lack of forgiveness that was a sin greater than anything else that was done. Not forgiving another sinner is a greater sin than anything anyone else can do to us. Ouch. The Savior is using this lack of forgiveness as a blanket condemnation. It doesn't matter what was done, if we choose not to forgive that person we automatically stand condemned for an even greater sin. Why?

If you commit an offense against me of any magnitude you want to imagine, and I don't forgive you, that means I have placed myself in the position of being your judge and jury. I have condemned you for your crime against God, but I have no authority to do so. No one has the right to personally dictate to God how He is supposed to judge another. He, and He alone is the judge of all. It is an offense against God to try to take that right away from Him and exercise His rights as the judge of the quick and the dead for ourselves. It negates and slanders all that He did for us in His Atoning sacrifice on our behalf.

> 10 I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.
>
> 11 And ye ought to say in your hearts—let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds.

When a church leader is required by virtue of his calling to place a judgment on a person, that judgment is as a representative of Christ's church, not his own personal feelings. There is a difference between the representative of Christ's kingdom passing

judgment and the person as an individual passing judgment. This is why all our judgments as Bishops, Stake Presidents, etc. need to be made with love and concern for the welfare of the person's soul. A spirit of vengeance should never be seen coming from a leader in the church.

Discussion on forgiveness

I would like to point out just a couple of observations about forgiveness that comes from these verses and from the comments made in the Come, Follow Me manual on the subject.

I just mentioned that there shouldn't be any vengeance on the part of a church leader when having to pass any form of judgment on worthiness of a person. As a personal observation it seems to me that my heart should be so full of gratitude for the mercy that Christ shows me in forgiving my own sins that it should be obvious that it is an affront to him to refuse to forgive another person for any reason.

Forgiving isn't the same as accepting someone's sin. It is the process of leaving the results of someone's perceived sin up to that person and their Savior, just as my own sins are a matter between me and the Savior of my soul. There is only one person who can forgive sins for all eternity, and that is Jesus, the universal Savior.

If you remember the stories from the New Testament you will recall the story of the man who borrowed an enormous amount of money from his master then lost it all. He pled for forgiveness and the master readily forgave his entire debt. But then this same man turned to a fellow servant who owed him just a few coins, and when the man couldn't repay him he threw him in debtor's prison until the amount was repaid. When the master found out about it he called in the full amount of the debt the man owed him, and would no longer show him any mercy. This is the same principle the Lord is using in section 64. We owe God much for our sins, it is a wicked thing to be unforgiving of our neighbor, no matter what they have done. He should have been so filled with gratitude to his master that he readily forgave his fellow servant's sin as being a small thing in comparison with his own debt owed and forgiven.

God wants us to become as forgiving and merciful as He is. This is the essence of what Zion is about. When we don't forgive one another then we have rejected the basic premise that Zion is based upon. We can't be kind and loving to people we can't bring

ourselves to forgive, for we can never become selfless toward someone we refuse to forgive. In refusing to forgive someone we have set ourself above them, and think of ourself as superior to them. This disqualifies us to live in Zion.

It is the nature of being human that we offend one another. It can't be prevented. Our intentions can be as pure as the driven snow, and we will still cause hurt feelings to someone. This means that forgiveness needs to be universal, for no one is exempt.

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