

## Come Follow Me Class Insights – 47 – Doctrine and Covenants 133-134

I'm Taylor, and I'm Tyler. This is Book of Mormon Central's Come Follow Me Insights. Today Doctrine and Covenants sections 133 and 134.

This is a very unusual set of sections for a variety of reasons. As we jump in, section 133, if you'll notice looking at the timing, we're in November of 1831. Some of you are thinking, wait, we just did section 132 which was in the year of 1843. Now we're going back in time twelve years? Why? Well keep in mind that section 1 was given in 1831, probably November 1<sup>st</sup>, and then section 133 is given probably two days later. Here's your - your preface to the book called the Book of Commandments, or in 1833 what was going to be the Book of Commandments, and this was given as the appendix to this Book of Commandments. So we needed something to give the context and then they wanted something to tie it all together and everything in between. Well, since that time, since 1833 and then 1835 when we get our first Doctrine and Covenants, not just Book of Commandments, other revelations have been added after the appendix, and you'll notice one of those that we're going to cover in today's lesson is section 134 which, if, now that we're in this overview phase, look at the heading to section 134. It says, "A declaration of belief regarding governments and laws," and it's given in 1835, August 17<sup>th</sup>. So this is right at the publication of the book that we now call the Doctrine and Covenants.

It's kind of like an amendment, or this add on addendum because there's some pretty significant things happening in the Church regarding government and laws, and we'll talk about that, but keep in mind, Joseph Smith did not receive section 134. This was written probably by Oliver Cowdery, presented at a conference of the Church when Joseph Smith and Frederick G. Williams, the other members of the – the First Presidency – they're gone in 1835 on a mission to Michigan and they're not even there when this gets accepted by the group – these – these writings of Oliver Cowdery regarding law and government.

So 133 from a contextual standpoint, there's this important principle that God speaks to us in a language that matters to us, that makes sense to us. And so when this revelation's received in November, you have a lot of members of the Church, many of them come from the Calvinistic faith where they are very motivated by end times, or apocalyptic or millennial thinking, and you get a lot of that here where God is really trying to impress upon their minds that the work is accelerating; it's time to get going and really, there's even a sense of not fear or dread, but like if you don't go out and preach the gospel, doom will hit. And it's different than other passages you might get in the New Testament where God's healing and doing his miracles, and so it's interesting how he works with the people where they're at and he knows that if he's going to accelerate the work, he needs to speak to them in a way that gets their attention.

If you look here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we will not be motivated by the same wording, and so if you've listened to modern-day prophets, General Conference, we hear different words and different stories, and I love how God works with us where we're at. So yes, this is preserved revelation for us that we should derive principles and meaning, but you might find that some of the language sounds like – a little bit different than you might typically hear in General Conference, and again, it's very much God speaking within the cultural perspective of the people he's communicating with.

Yes, so as we jump into verse 1, you'll notice that it sounds an awful lot like section 1; they were given two days apart, this appendix. Verse 1 starts with, "Hearken, O ye people of my church, saith the Lord your God, and hear the word of the Lord concerning you." So he starts the same way, and then he quotes Malachi chapter 3 verse 1: "The Lord who shall suddenly come to his temple; the Lord who shall come down upon the world with a curse to judgment; yea upon all the nations that forget God, and upon all the ungodly among you." Again, as Taylor was saying, you and I aren't used to this kind of – this kind of language in our General Conference talks. We – we rarely hear prophets and apostles and leaders of the Church stand up and speak in these – in these end times ways of – (overtalk) come and curse with judgment and justice is going to – is going to come down and smite us, and so it's really –

it's really a difficult thing at times for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to put those lenses on and read historically what people are being motivated and moved by and thinking wow, that's a – that's an angry God, and it sounds like an Old Testament God, a distant God, not the one that we hear about today.

It's okay, if as long as we're aware of the fact that what Taylor was saying, God speaks to every generation according to their language and understanding. We've talked about that before in previous lessons where God is going to speak your language according to your understanding in ways that will help motivate you to move forward and do things. And these early saints in 1831, they're being asked to do some incredible – make some incredible sacrifices and for them, because of their upbringing, whether it's from a Calvinist tradition or an Armenian tradition or from a Universalist tradition, they're – they're motivated by this – by this type of rhetoric, by this type of speech coming from God.

And yet there's still these beautiful passages here. Look at verse 3. "For he shall make bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of their God." And Tyler and I have talked about this on occasion, he and I both have been interested in the symbolism between an arm and a hand and (unclear) some of the fascinating things that we have in terms of symbolism, what's going on here in this verse, if you do an exhaustive search on every single time in all the scriptures where the word arm appears and another exhaustive search on every single time where the word hand appears, with only two exceptions, every time the arm of the Lord is mentioned, it's – or the wing, gathering under the wing - it's God extending his covenant to you, opening up his arms of covenantal connection with you to say come, I – I will be your God, you will be my people.

And every time you see the hand, it's God now executing either justice or mercy, and interestingly, if you look, usually in scriptures, if it's the right hand that's being mentioned, then God is delivering blessings and benefits and privileges and mercy and grace because the people have kept those covenants. And if it's the left hand, then it's God delivering justice and judgment and punishment and destruction and bad things are happening in

the world. And if he doesn't tell you whether it's the right or the left, then it seems that there are consequences coming and some of them are good and some of them are bad and some of them, it depends on where you are, whether they're good or bad. But in this case, don't you love it that as God opens up this last – last dispensation, he's extending his arm of mercy to all of us. And, by the way, for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, God is not up in heaven getting great joy out of punishing and destroying and having left hand kind of consequences fall upon you or upon us in general, there's - there's an awful lot of him extending the arm – the arms of his safety, being encircled about in his arms of his love and of his covenant and he's giving us these – these options and these abilities to come to him.

So even though there is some language here in section 133 that might sound kind of stern or a bit foreign, if you look right here at verse 3, one of the key themes of the restoration is God extending his arms of mercy. He concludes the Doctrine and Covenants – obviously we've added some sections to it since this conclusion was provided by God, it's all about I am enveloping the world with love and mercy and salvation for all those who will be willing to accept my embrace.

Beautiful. Now look at verse 5. "Go ye out from Babylon. Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." And then in verse 6, "Call your solemn assemblies, and speak often one to another. And let every man call upon the name of the Lord." Don't you love this idea that Babylon in scriptures always represents the fallen, natural world in which we live? Flee from those worldly tendencies and come to Zion, gather together. Remember this is 1831 where the call is constantly gather. At this point, it's in Kirtland and then in Zion and then later it's going to be northern Missouri and then it's going to be in Nauvoo and then it's going to be in the intermountain west, and then from there, it's going to be gather in your stake wherever you live in the world. Gather to Zion.

And what do you do once you're gathered? Every man call upon the name of the Lord. Isn't it an amazing thing in our congregations when you can picture each individual in that congregation turning heavenward collectively saying we need help, we're all opening up conduits for revelation to flow rather than

going to church or rather than gathering in a body of saints and saying well, the bishop or the Relief Society president or our prophet or the apostles will do all of the praying and seeking God's guidance. What an amazing thing when every person, every man, woman and child turns heavenward and says, we need help. We need guidance. We need direction. We need mercy. We need – we need that sustaining influence of thy grace. It's a beautiful thing that comes out of this gathering effort that he continues to talk about in verse 7.

So let's talk about this word Babylon briefly, because we all generally know that Babylon's a place we don't want to be at, but let me actually map out what the word means and how it could be a symbol of what we should be avoiding. I actually do know how to spell this word, I just got myself thinking about the Semitic. So actually, the word bab in Semitic languages means gate. You go to Egypt today, there are gate keepers, their name is the (boab?) This part of the word actually comes from a word you might be familiar with. You might know the word Elohim. In Semitic, El means God and so in this word bab-el-on it literally means gate of the gods. So the Babylonians had lots of idols that they worshipped and they had all these temples dedicated to all their different gods and the temples were gates into the presence of those idols. When we think to ourselves what idols do we have in our day that distract us from gathering to Zion, and this is actually plural here. It literally means gate of the gods. We might ask ourselves what are the gates that we have entered into that are distractions, idols of the world, all sorts of temptations that keep us from gathering with God and his saints, turning to him at his temples and gathering to Zion. So I love that the word Babylon is this - in the original language is an invitation for us to think about what gates are we entering into and where are we putting our focus. Is it false, fallen idols, or are we going to turn to the real gate of God at baptism and enter his temple and turn to Zion?

So now the opposite of Babylon in the scriptures is usually Zion. Verse 9, "Behold, and lo, this shall be their cry and the voice of the Lord unto all people. Go ye forth unto the land of Zion." Isn't this fascinating that our call is to get people to flee from Babylon, out of the world, and bring them to Zion, bring them into the safety of the kingdom of God on earth?" But then what do we

do? We turn right around and we send missionaries out into the world to try to declare that message, so we actually go out into Babylon. Look at verse 10, "Yea, let the cry go forth among all people. Awake and arise and go forth to meet the Bridegroom; behold and lo, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Prepare yourselves for the great day of the Lord." Again, in 1831, that is one of the greatest motivating factors for these people is end times prophecies. It somehow just gets them – just gets them activated, motivated to do things.

We know we live in the latter days, it's part of the name of the church, and the end is coming, and Jesus really focuses for them because he knew it would help them push the work forward. Imagine if he said eat, drink and be merry because you've now been saved, so just enjoy yourself in Kirtland. There was so much work that needed to be done to set the foundation for the restoration and to strengthen the Church to go forth unto all the world, we can't do it if people are sitting around like oh great. I'm in. The end's not anywhere nigh. I don't need to be motivated to get moving, and God gets them up and moving, and then he calls again. He says in verse 15 – or 14, 15 and 16, flee from Babylon. He talks about spiritual Babylon is wickedness. Verse 15, "Thus saith the Lord, let not your flight be in haste, but let all things be prepared before you, and he that goeth, let him not look back lest sudden destruction shall come upon him." It's kind of like hearkening back to the story of Lot and his family leaving Sodom and Gomorrah. It's time to leave and move up to higher ground and we have the story of Lot's wife who turns back, she's like I have this longing interest for my homeland, my original Babylon and he was like stay focused on me on your path to Zion.

Then, you'll notice as we shift down clear down to verse 18, he gets this other prophecy, "When the Lamb shall stand upon Mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty four thousand, having his Father's name written on their foreheads." Verse 19, "Wherefore, prepare ye for the coming of the Bridegroom; go ye out – or go ye, go ye out to meet him." Because verse 20 tells us he'll stand upon the Mount of Olivet, and upon the mighty ocean, even the great deep, and upon the islands of the sea, and upon the land of Zion." So the Second Coming is, in this verse he's telling he's going to stand on the

Mount of Olives which is directly east of Jerusalem looking down at the temple mount on Mount Moriah and behind that, further to the west, you have Mount Zion and he's going to be known to those people. He'll stand on the islands of the sea; he'll stand on the great deep, and also upon the land of Zion.

So it's these multiple appearances to different groups throughout the world that will see him for his Second Coming, and you'll notice you have the anointing of the 144,000 right before that in verse 18. Now, if we skip down over a whole bunch of the events that it talks about are going to happen, look at verse 37. What is this – what is going to happen after all of these events? "This gospel shall be preached unto every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. And the servants of God shall go forth, saying with a loud voice, fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come." You'll notice that in scriptures, and ancient scriptures, whenever they're talking about the world, our earth, it usually comes to us in fours. It's usually the four corners of the world, the four winds, or cardinal directions, the four cardinal directions – north, south, east and west. It's usually every nation, kindred, tongue and people, or some variation of four. Often, not always, but often the earth comes at us in fours. And isn't it fascinating that often the heavenly, with the godhead comes in the number three. What happens when heaven combines with earth? You get that number seven for the ancients that represents completion, wholeness, perfection, lacking nothing.

I love the fact that – that when Jesus comes and makes connections, covenantal connections with the earth, when the Bridegroom finally comes to take his bride, that's where perfection is found. We don't have perfection in isolation from him and quite frankly, heaven – the whole work and glory of God is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of all of us on the earth. That's where perfection is found is when the two come together in this beautiful, covenant relationship of I will be your God, you will be my people, and that ultimately happens for us.

That heaven meeting earth connecting point is started in temples which in 1831 wasn't – wasn't on their mind; it's not part of their dialogue back in –

when section 133 was given. But now from a – from a much later, historical viewpoint looking back, we can say whoa, we're getting things more and more in place to establish the elements that are necessary for the Lord to culminate his work and return to the earth and you were sent to this earth at this time to help prepare the world for the Second Coming of the Savior. Whether it happens in your lifetime or after, is not as important as the fact that we can do some things to help prepare the bride and to prepare the world and to preach to every nation and kindred, tongue and people the glorious message, the good news of the gospel and prepare the world for his coming.

The good news is important here because sometimes we have phrases like verse 38 that says, "Fear God and give glory to him." It doesn't say be afraid of God. The words fear God in its Old Testament context means to show reverence and respect. And notice how it says give glory to him. It's not about taking glory to ourselves; we don't go out and serve in God's kingdom for the intention of like getting our name on a building or becoming famous, it's about how do we help expand God's glory and shed forth more light and goodness throughout the world. Just a little insight there.

Beautiful. Now sometimes we can get caught in a trap of discouragement. Let me give you one, little example of that. If you look at the numbers, there are more babies born in one day on our planet than our missionaries baptize in an entire year. We have more babies being born in one day than we're adding through convert baptisms in the entire year which can start to get a little discouraging like, oh no, we're falling behind. The important thing to remember is, Jesus Christ stands at the head of this work. He knows what he's doing and we're told in other scriptures, he will accelerate his work in his own time and in his own way. What is that going to look like? I don't know, I have some ideas but that's all they are. I don't know, but I know that he's in charge and he knows exactly what needs to happen in exactly the order that it needs to happen in order for the kingdom of God to roll forth and accomplish all of its purposes. And there's something nice about not feeling responsible for making sure that all of these prophecies get fulfilled, but rather turning heavenward, calling on the name of the Lord, and simply saying things like what can I do to assist thee in – in the great work of salvation on the earth?



How can I, little, old me, how can I help create more connecting points with heaven for people and for families and for groups to help prepare the world in such a way that the work can move forward? That's – it's beautiful when you can assist in the work without feeling over-anxious about trying to make sure that all these prophecies are fulfilled and that we're – we're marking those dates on the calendar for when Jesus is going to come, and we've got to get all these things done by then. If we live our life, turn heavenward, hear him, tune our ears to the things that he's asking us to do, we're on safe ground.

The principle here is that there's a lot to be done in spreading the kingdom of God and ultimately, God will do his work. So we don't have to overwhelm ourselves that he didn't ask us to do everything. He's just asked us to be anxiously engaged in a good cause.

Good. Now, after talking about these various places where Jesus is going to make himself manifest on the Mount of Olives, in Zion, on the islands of the sea, then you get this interesting section starting in verse 46 where it says, "Who is this that cometh down from God in heaven with dyed garments; yea, from the regions which are not known, clothed in his glorious apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? And he shall say: I am he who spake in righteousness, mighty to save." I love the fact that he says I'm mighty to save. He didn't say I'm mighty to destroy. He is. He does have that might and power to destroy but he emphasizes here in this section that he is one that is mighty to save.

Now look at verse 48. "And the Lord shall be red in his apparel, and his garments like him that treadeth in the wine-vat." So in antiquity, they would go and pick the grapes out of their vineyards and they would bring them in their baskets and dump them into these big vats or into a stone pit in the ground, and then they would get people inside of these vats or these pits and they would – they would sing, they would dance, they would move around, and they're crushing those grapes to create this fresh wine, this grape juice; they're squeezing it out. This is the wine press. You'll notice what Jesus tells us about the wine press. He says I tread the winepress alone. He was in that vat alone and it's very slippery, it's very hard to crush those grapes when you're alone

versus with a whole group in unison marching and dancing or jumping to a beat where you are much more effective. But Jesus is saying I tread the wine press alone. There was nobody with him. It's a very difficult thing to do, and in the process of treading on those grapes, what happens is, you get splashed by that grape juice and it stains your clothing.

Here, we're told that he's going to come dressed in red apparel like him that treadeth in the wine-vat, a beautiful symbolism to his infinite atoning process that he went through for us that when he returns, nobody will miss the color of his raiment. Now isn't it ironic that Jesus gives us something to remember what he did in that symbolic wine-vat. He gives us a little cup in our sacrament service to drink in remembrance of the blood that he shed for us. That's why wine was originally used; it ties in beautifully with the symbolism here. We now use water.

Notice that he – he gives us a direction, a directive that we need to wash our garments, our clothing in his blood. Why? Not so that it turns red, but so that it becomes whiter than anything else that's white, so that it becomes cleansed and purified. You see, our blood, our sins, our mortality stained him and his blood doesn't stain us; it purifies us. The most powerful cleansing agent ever is the blood of Christ risen through his atonement. It will purify, it will cleanse better than any – any chemical known to mankind as far as the eternal nature of who we're trying to become and what we're trying to do with our life. It's Christ's blood tied into the symbolism here that will make us pure.

So expanding on this, when we are presented before God, our garments need to be stained with blood. And if it's with our own blood, symbolically our own sins, we're not allowed into the presence of God. But if we have symbolically stained our garments with his blood, this cleansing, purifying power of his blood, we are admitted in. Remember, when we make the baptismal covenant, we take upon ourselves his name; we become Christians. And we need to be like him and to be like him means we also need to be stained with the atoning blood of Jesus Christ just as his garments were as he talks about here, that he's tread the wine press alone. He invites us to participate in that salvific act, and we don't really have to tread the wine press as he did. We simply have to

accept that he did it for us through baptism, through faith and repentance, receiving the Holy Ghost and enduring to the end by every week declaring our intention to be loyal to God through sacrament.

Beautiful. So then we get these - these additional atoning references starting in verse 30 – verse 50 where he says, "And his voice shall be heard: I have trodden the wine-press alone, and have brought judgment upon all people; and none were with me." Go down to verse 52. "Now the year of my redeemed is come; and they shall mention the loving kindness of their Lord, and all that he has bestowed upon them according to his goodness, and according to his loving kindness, forever and ever." I don't know about you, but when somebody does something bad to me or when I suffer something that I didn't deserve and somebody else did, doesn't make me happy. But you'll notice Jesus – look at verse 53, "In all their afflictions he was afflicted. And the angel of his presence saved them; and in his love, and in his pity; he redeemed them, and bore them, and carried them all the days of old." He's – he's responding to this terrible price that was placed on his shoulders, the burden that he bore, he's responding not with anger, do you know what I paid for you? It's a loving, kind, arms outstretched look of come to me, I know what you're going through. In fact, I'm the only one who ultimately knows exactly what you're going through because I went through it for you and I can – I can understand you better than you can understand you.

Then he – he starts talking about Enoch and Noah and Moses and Elijah and John, and all these people, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the graves of the saints shall be opened, these glorious things that are going to happen at the Lord's Second Coming and people coming forth.

And these are all people that are being redeemed or have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and I love this idea the graves of the saints shall – we have these famous figures from the past, but then there's like this blanket statement, all those who chose Jesus in this life will be redeemed, as will all those who never had the chance to hear of God. In the next life they will have the opportunity to choose him. There's enormous, divine mercy in the plan of

salvation that every creature that God has created has an opportunity to choose the greatest amount of joy and to receive it.

Absolutely. Look at verse 58 now. He's doing all of this, "To prepare the weak for those things which are coming on the earth, and for the Lord's errand in the day when the weak shall confound the wise, and the little one become a strong nation, and two shall put their tens of thousands to flight." There's going to be things that God does as things continue to move forward in time, to make it so that his power is more manifest in our efforts.

Look at verse 59. "And by the weak things of the earth the Lord shall thresh the nations by the power of his Spirit." You'll notice this is the second time this has happened where they've made a little change of one word in the 2013 edition of our Doctrine and Covenants, 'cause in the 1981 edition and previous editions, it was thrash. It's this go out and thrash the nations of the world. But here it's changed to thresh which matches the context way better than going out and destroying, thrashing those nations. No, it's the parable of the wheat and tares coming through again, that we go out and we gather the wheat out of the fields we – so that we can thresh the wheat, not thrash people, not destroy people. It's not – that's not God's purpose here.

And so look at verse 62. "Unto him that repenteth and sanctifieth himself before the Lord shall be given eternal life." That's exactly what Taylor was just talking about. This isn't rocket science; it's turning to the Lord, repenting and – and pleading with God to sanctify us, we're promised eternal life. Otherwise, we get cut off.

Right, it says, "And upon them that hearken not to the voice of the Lord shall be fulfilled that which was written by the prophet Moses, that they should be cut off from among the people." We've shown this before, but God is coming, he said in verse 3, "I bare my holy arm," I'm here to gather everybody in and it – remember the word to call or even the Church it means those who are called out and when God calls to you, come, gather with me to Zion, anyone who refuses the call purposely and continuously and permanently has avoided the embracing arms of God and so to be cut off literally means they are not in that embrace, and that's not God's choice, it's their choice. God is not saying I'm

not allowing you in, they have made the choice, I will not hearken, I will not obey, I will not join in that covenantal relationship. So it's powerful that our agency is totally and entirely preserved throughout the plan of salvation.

Now, I want to share a little concept from the book called *The Great Divorce* by C. S. Lewis where he shares this incredible concept in chapter 9 of that book. So for those of you who may not be familiar with *The Great Divorce*, it's the story of a bus ride from hell up to the – the outskirts of heaven. So the point of the book is these people who are coming from hell up into this place that they call the valley of the shadow of life where they interact with - with various people who are heavenly and they're trying to encourage them to let go of those things that – that are binding them down and holding them down, so they can come into heaven.

Well, C. S. Lewis, being the writer, one of his heroes in life was George MacDonald, a Scottish writer and he calls him in this book, his teacher, and at one point in chapter 9, you get George MacDonald saying this. This is profound as it ties into what we've been talking about from section 133. Quote: both good and evil, when they are full grown, become retrospective. Not only this valley, but all this earthly past will have been heaven to those who are saved. Not only the twilight in that town, but all their life on earth too will then be seen by the damned to have been hell. That is what mortals misunderstand. They say of some temporal suffering, no future bliss can make up for this, not knowing that heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory, and of some sinful pleasure they say let me but have this and I'll take the consequences, little dreaming how damnation will spread back and back into their past and contaminate the pleasure of the sin. Both processes begin even before death, the good man's past begins to change so that his forgiven sins and remembered sorrows take on the quality of heaven. The bad man's past already conforms to his badness and is filled only with dreariness, and that is why, at the end of all things, when the sun rises here the twilight turns to blackness down there, the blessed will say, we have never lived anywhere except in heaven, and the lost, we were always in hell. And both will speak truly.

Now, to tie this into section 133, George McDonald introduces this other concept that ties in beautifully with Second Coming zeal and excitement that sometimes we have. Listen to what he says: There have been men before now who got so interested in proving the existence of God that they came to care nothing of God himself, as if the good Lord had nothing to do but exist. There have been some who have been so occupied in spreading Christianity, that they never gave a thought to Christ. Man, we see it in smaller matters, did you never know a lover of books that with all his first editions and signed copies, have lost the power to read them, or an organizer of charities that have lost all love for the poor, it is the subtlest of all the snares.

For me, the message, the take-away from section 133 is to not lose focus on Christ and on that covenantal connection that we have with him because we get so excited about any aspect of the gospel, even if it's something as big as his Second Coming, that we don't lose sight of the being who is actually coming to save us, because we get so excited about all the prophecies and about all the events and all of the – the predictions and all of the signs of the times that we've now looked beyond the mark and we've missed the point of how can I more clearly hear him and be on his errand be an instrument in his hands to do his work to prepare this world for his coming. It's an important question for us to wrestle with individually as we personally and collectively prepare for that coming.

So as we now turn our attention to section 134, this is a fascinating section, like we mentioned before, on a variety of levels, one, because Joseph Smith doesn't receive it as a revelation. It's written probably by Oliver Cowdery as he delivers it to a – a group in Kirtland when Joseph and Frederick G. Williams aren't even in the town, and it's accepted by unanimous vote to be included as part of the Doctrine and Covenants. Joseph Smith later on is going to approve that vote.

And the intention here is actually, it's almost like a declaration of belief, and not necessarily like here's this revelation from God, so we want to be careful here because there's important principles here but it's different than other sections.

Yeah, and part of the problem that we wrestle with in section 134 is the fact that Oliver Cowdery has been through an awful lot of persecution and he hasn't had the law to help uphold his rights and his freedoms and his liberties as a citizen of the United States, because keep in mind, Oliver Cowdery was living in Jackson County, Missouri during 1833 when the mob started doing all of the abuse of those members of the Church and expelling them from Jackson County in the fall of 1833. He's – he has seen the struggles of Zion's Camp and that fails to get them back onto their lands, and they've made redress to the government, and so you can understand from their perspective, where – where he's coming from in giving this declaration of belief regarding government and law.

At the same time, there have been some who have struggled with this section because he shares these perspectives from – from a constitutionalist perspective of say, James Madison or Thomas Jefferson, but at the same time, we have to understand that people like Madison and Jefferson and Franklin and George Washington and others, they had recognized that they weren't being given these freedoms and liberties and so they – they willingly made themselves traitors to their county and committed treason in order to try to establish a new nation and a new government to uphold these very things that they weren't being given, and yet in this section, like when you get to verse 12, he, at the very, very end, the last verse, he – he gives an example of we do not believe it right to interfere with the bondservants, neither preach the gospel to nor baptize them contrary to the will and wish of their masters, nor to meddle with or influence them in the least, to cause them to be dissatisfied with their situations in this life.

That kind of runs opposite to what Madison and Jefferson and Washington did. Or even what the gospel's about. And if you look at the context for Oliver Cowdery, one of the reasons that the members of the Church were run out of Missouri, was in part because of their open acceptance that slaves could or should be freed and were welcome into the gospel, and that created such a political problem that Oliver adds this in there, the safer approach would be, let's not interfere with slavery and let's let it be the way it is. And I suppose if we got to talk with Oliver Cowdery today with a long perspective he might say,

you know, maybe we should have been a little more proactive about this. So we have to be a little careful to not fully, you know, totally judge people in the past based on our present circumstances, but to understand their perspective, but just get to the point that the principles here about government ultimately mean while those who are in slavery should be liberated and given the same opportunities for freedom, and might we add that freedom is an on-going thing. We have in the Declaration of Independence – sorry, we have in the Constitution, in order to form a more perfect union. Now we want to recognize we're speaking from the United States here today; there are other countries with different approaches, but when we say a more perfect union, it's not like we've achieved perfect government. There's always ways of improving the world and we might think that – that everything's been achieved that could be good to be achieved, and the invitation is, wherever somebody is being oppressed or having less freedom than others, we have an opportunity to spread the light and goodness of God's truth to help liberate more people and more opportunity to become their better selves.

And so if you go back to verse 1, this is a beautiful opening to this – to this section. "We believe that governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man; and that he holds men accountable for their acts in relation to them, both in making laws and administering them, for the good and safety of society." This is a pretty powerful declaration of belief, that God has ordained these governments, but he's going to hold them accountable. What are governments there for? They are first, to "secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience, the right and control of property; and the protection of life," all of which were taken away from members of the Church in 1833 in Missouri and Oliver lived through it. Right!

Then look at verse 4. "We believe that religion is instituted of God." Did you catch the connection between verse 1 and 4? Governments were instituted of God, verse 4, "religion is instituted of God and that men are amenable to him, and to him only, for the exercise of it." And he talks about how your religious opinions can't infringe on the rights, freedoms and liberties of other people or you've stepped over a line, and law at that point, or government needs to come in and – and protect that group who has been diminished or abused in



any way, shape or form, recognizing that in the 1833 Jackson County context, much of the mob experience was fueled by preachers of other religions, and you put this all in this context and you can see, you can feel the frustration of these saints, saying this was – this was not fair what was done.

It was a massive injustice. And we live in a day where perhaps we're not in those same circumstances where we might ask ourselves, Lord, is it I? Am I ever denying people their right of conscience? Their right of worship? And I'm sure we all could probably find situations where we've felt a little bit impinged upon, but we also want to be careful. It's not simply about hoping other people protect our rights; it's about us being responsible to protect other people's rights as well.

And then one of the – one of the aspects in section 134 that is – is a critical element in moving forward in peaceful ways is contained in verse 5. "We believe that all men are bound to sustain and uphold the respective governments in which they reside, while protected in their inherent and inalienable rights by the laws of such governments, and that sedition and rebellion are unbecoming every citizen thus protected." So you'll notice if Madison and Jefferson and Washington were there, they'd say we were not given those rights. Our freedoms and our liberties were not being protected. That's why we rose up in rebellion against the king of England at the time.

So then you'll notice at the very end of verse 5, he says, "that all governments have a right to enact such laws as in their own judgments are best calculated to secure the public interest; at the same time, however, holding sacred the freedom of conscience." That's a beautiful – a beautiful juxtaposition to try to figure out where you find that middle ground between what's best for the public and still holding sacred the freedom of individual conscience.

It's this ongoing conversation around the good of society as well as individual rights and responsibilities and I don't think we'll ever get to a final conclusion about the best way to do things, and so it's important, as members of God's kingdom and as citizens wherever we are, to be thoughtfully engaged with those around us, around issues that matter, to become well-informed and do

what we can do to expand people's agency while also protecting their rights and privileges and also being responsible with that.

Now, so then as you go down a little bit further, you'll notice that in this section Oliver Cowdery also expands on this idea of what rights do religions have with regards to their members who maybe have – have done some things that call their membership into question. Verse 10. "We believe that all religious societies have a right to deal with their members for disorderly conduct, according to the rules and regulations of such societies; provided that such dealings be for fellowship and good standing." But then he goes on to say that we don't believe that it's the right of any religion to take away property or life or punish in those sorts of ways. Notice the very end of verse 10, they can only excommunicate them from their society and withdraw from them their fellowship.

So you'll notice we no longer use the word excommunicate, it carries a very negative connotation with it. Now we talk about removing membership privileges or restricting membership privileges, and this is in an effort to help people through the repentance process, to come unto Christ and be perfected in him if they've struggled with certain things in the past.

And now finally, in verse 11, he talks about how men should appeal to the civil law for redress of all wrongs and grievances. You'll notice that members of the Church back in 1835, they've done that, and they're going to continue to do it, and even more so after 1838, their expulsion from Missouri. They're going to do it like crazy and the law is not going to be on their side. It's not going to reward them; it's not going to rule in their favor in most of these situations, and yet, they leave the ultimate judgment with God, which is a little bit like what Jesus does. All of these wrongs are given to him and he – he finds a way to actually not become bitter over it, but to move forward and to have it become an extension of heaven for him, back to the C. S. Lewis concept in *The Great Divorce*.

If we turn to God, if we connect with heaven, then we'll see God's goodness in the midst of that infuriating unfairness and injustice as Elder Renlund talked about in April General Conference 2021. We'll see God's goodness and his

mercy and his grace and how much we grew through those terrible injustices, and rather than taking that matter into our own hand and seeking retribution by our own execution of that justice, we will find that we've become more like the Lord Jesus Christ. What an amazing thing it is that Jesus offers us this capacity to come to him, drop all of the injustices at his feet after we have done everything we can to peacefully resolve all those concerns and all of those disagreements and all of those injustices with the law, and regardless what happens with the law, to be able to drop those burdens at the feet of the Savior and say, I can't carry this anymore, I need help, and to be again encircled in the arms of his love and his mercy and his perfect judgment, he who understands all things. That's the promise.

So as we close today's lesson, our invitation for all of us is to not get so caught up in the injustices of the world or all of the aspects of the gospel that – that maybe can become distracting for us, whether it's Second Coming or any of the principles of the gospel that we lose focus and our attention being put on Jesus Christ on God, on trying to become more like them, becoming more heavenly, becoming an extension of heaven in the relationships around us. He will help us with this as we do our part to prepare the world for his Second Coming and make that bride as beautiful and as ready as we possibly can for that great day when he comes to make that ultimate connection with us, yet again, and begin his millennial reign.

Spread light and goodness. And know that you're loved.