

Mosiah and Stewardship

In Mosiah 26 we find the story of when Alma first established the church in the land of Zarahemla. His position as leader of the church was authorized by King Mosiah. Soon thereafter some members of the church began to apostatize, and so were brought before Alma to be judged. Alma is described as being troubled¹. I imagine that he had not anticipated that, once in the truth, some would choose to depart from it. So he was unsure how to proceed. He determined to take the transgressors before King Mosiah so they could be dealt with appropriately. Since the society was largely based on the tenets of the church it may have seemed reasonable to expect the king to deal with these misdeeds. However, King Mosiah correctly understood that this was a religious issue, and notwithstanding his stature as a prophet and seer, he returned the cases to Alma for church discipline.

Skipping over to Mosiah 28 we find the opposite case. Mosiah's sons, having been converted to the truth, now desired to go to preach to the Lamanites, and asked their father for permission to go on this mission. From earlier experience² it is unclear whether legally it was necessary to get permission from the king to go to the land of the Lamanites, but certainly the issue of a foreign mission could have been interpreted as a religious question and referred to Alma. In fact, King Mosiah pursued a religious inquiry, but rather than going through Alma he went directly to the Lord in prayer.

I see in these two stories an interesting study in stewardship. In the first instance King Mosiah, although in a position of authority over Alma, understood the importance of respecting Alma's stewardship as leader of the church. In the second story Mosiah understood his stewardship, not as king nor prophet, but as a father, and acted accordingly.

I wonder sometimes how strongly we feel the weight of our own stewardships. Do we deal with those things in our stewardships as we should, without burdening our leaders? Do we take the issues to our leaders that can only be resolved by proper church authority?

Some examples spring to mind. A friend related how a third ward was assigned to meet in the building he was in. The Young Men's and Young Women's presidencies from the wards were given the task of

1 Verse 10

2 Mosiah 7:2; 9:3

resolving how the building would be allocated for youth activities. Although they met and worked up a good plan, as soon as there was any disagreement they came back to the bishopric to seek a resolution. They could have resolved the problem within their own stewardship, but missed the opportunity and required leadership intervention.

On the other hand, I have had recent experience with a returned missionary who committed a moral transgression, but decided he would abstain from taking the sacrament for a few weeks as a sort of penance. If the transgression was truly serious enough for any sort of disciplinary then it should have been resolved with his bishop – he actually has no authority to impose church discipline on himself.

I believe that part of our responsibility as members of the Lord's church is to understand our respective stewardships and operate within them. We may not always be able to look up the answers in a book, but living the gospel is meant to involve the exercise of agency and the acquisition of understanding. We can certainly counsel with others – including and especially our leaders – to understand where our stewardship lies. But we should avoid overstepping our stewardship and failing to fulfill our stewardship with equal care.