

LECTURE 4

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine And Covenants | VOLUME: 1835 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

Lecture 4 of the 'Lectures on Faith' (originally part of the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants) presents a systematic theology regarding the attributes of God. The text posits that for a rational being to exercise faith unto 'life and salvation,' they must possess a correct idea of God's character and attributes. It identifies six essential attributes: Knowledge, Faith (or Power), Justice, Judgment, Mercy, and Truth. The lecture deduces that without a firm mental grasp of these specific attributes, humanity would lack the confidence to trust God during tribulation or to believe He has the power to save. A significant theological innovation in this text is the classification of 'Faith' as an attribute of God Himself, equating it with the creative power by which worlds are framed. The text concludes that because God is unchangeable, Latter-day Saints have the same foundation and privilege to exercise faith as the ancients, provided they understand these attributes. The lecture emphasizes a cognitive, knowledge-based approach to soteriology, where correct data about God is the engine that generates saving faith.

KEY FIGURES

God (The Deity), Jesus Christ, Latter Day Saints, Former Day Saints

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. COGNITIVE NECESSITY FOR FAITH

Assertion: Faith unto salvation is impossible without a correct intellectual understanding of God's specific attributes.

"For without the idea of the existence of these attributes in the Deity, men could not exercise faith in him for life and salvation (Paragraph 11)"

Evangelical Comparison: This text argues for a 'knowledge-first' soteriology where the efficacy of faith is strictly limited by the accuracy of the believer's mental concept of God. In contrast, Evangelical theology holds that while true knowledge of God is vital, saving faith (fiducia) is a trust in the person of Christ, often exercised by those with limited theological sophistication (e.g., the thief on the cross). The text makes the 'idea' of the attribute the power source, whereas the Bible presents the Holy Spirit as the agent of regeneration.

2. FAITH AS AN ATTRIBUTE OF GOD

Assertion: God possesses the attribute of Faith, which is defined as power or the creative force.

"Secondly, Faith, or power. Heb. 11:3. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God. (Paragraph 6)"

Evangelical Comparison: This is a critical theological divergence. The text redefines faith as a metaphysical principle of power ('faith or power') that even God utilizes to create. In Evangelical theology, God is the *object* of faith, not a possessor of it. God operates by His omnipotence and sovereign will. To say God has faith implies He is dependent on an outside force or is hoping for a result, which contradicts His omniscience and sovereignty. This definition shifts faith from 'trust' to 'manipulation of spiritual laws.'

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the definition of faith and the nature of God. By asserting God has 'faith,' the text alters the Creator-creature distinction, suggesting faith is a universal law to which even God is subject. Furthermore, the soteriology is Gnostic-adjacent, implying that 'correct ideas' (gnosis) are the mechanism that unlocks salvation, rather than the grace of God received by a simple, perhaps even uneducated, trust. This places the burden of salvation on the believer's cognitive accuracy.

Shared Values:

God is unchangeable; God is merciful and just; God is the Creator; Scripture is a source of truth

Friction Points:

1. [Major] Sola Fide – Shifts faith from trust in Christ to a work of intellectual assent and cognitive precision.
2. [Critical] Theology Proper – Attributes 'faith' to God, implying God is subject to a principle of power or lacks fullness in Himself.
3. [Major] Sola Gratia – Implies salvation is accessible only to those capable of correct theological deduction.

Semantic Warnings:

"Faith"

In Text: A principle of power; a force by which God creates and governs.

Evangelical: Trust, dependence, and assurance in God's character and promises (Hebrews 11:1).

Example: *The text says God framed worlds through 'faith' (power). The Bible says God created by His word/command.*

"Salvation"

In Text: Linked to 'eternal glory' and 'exaltation,' requiring specific knowledge to attain.

Evangelical: Deliverance from sin and death through Christ's atonement (Ephesians 2:8).

Example: *The text implies one cannot be saved without the specific idea of God's attributes.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Obtaining 'eternal life,' 'eternal glory,' and being 'partakers of his glory' (Paragraph 1, 3).

How Attained: Through the exercise of faith, which is only possible after planting 'correct ideas' of God's attributes in the mind.

Basis of Assurance: Logical deduction: If God is Just/Merciful/True, He ***must*** save those who trust Him. Assurance comes from the 'idea' of these attributes.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text adds a cognitive work (acquiring correct ideas) as a prerequisite to faith. Sola Fide asserts faith is the instrument, not the result of perfect theology. (Romans 4:5 - God justifies the ungodly).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Commit the paragraphs of the lecture to memory (Note at end of text)
2. Reflect sincerely and candidly upon the ideas of God's attributes (Paragraph 17)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Acquire precise theological knowledge as a requirement for salvation
2. Align one's mental concept of God exactly with the six attributes listed to ensure faith is valid

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says God has the attribute of 'Faith.' In the Bible, faith is the evidence of things ***not seen*.** What is there that God does not see, that He would need faith?
2. If my ability to exercise saving faith depends on my having 'correct ideas' of God, how accurate does my theology need to be before I am saved?
3. Does God save us because we understand Him perfectly, or because He understands our weakness perfectly?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Sure Foundation – The text expresses a longing for certainty and a solid rock to stand on. [1 Corinthians 3:11 - 'For no other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.]
2. Deliverance from Fear – The text identifies the human need to be free from the fear of judgment. [1 John 4:18 - 'Perfect love casteth out fear.' It is God's love for us, not our intellectual grasp of Him, that removes fear.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Intellectual Perfectionism [Severe] – The believer is burdened with the fear that if their mental concept of God is slightly flawed, their faith is powerless and they cannot be saved. This turns theology into a high-stakes exam.
2. Uncertainty [Moderate] – By making faith a 'power' to be wielded rather than a 'rest' to be entered, the believer constantly questions if they are generating enough faith-power to secure blessings or salvation.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Rational deduction based on scriptural data.

Verification Method: Logical reflection ('By a little reflection it will be seen...', Paragraph 11).

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the illumination of the Holy Spirit and the self-attesting nature of Scripture (1 Corinthians 2:14), rather than purely logical deduction of attributes.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1835

Authorship: Joseph Smith (traditionally), though scholars note significant input from Sidney Rigdon.

Textual Issues: These lectures were canonized in the 1835 D&C as the 'Doctrine' portion but were decanonized in 1921 by the LDS Church for not being consistent with later revelations (specifically regarding the Godhead).