

LECTURE 5

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants (1835 Edition) | VOLUME: Lectures on Faith | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith (historically attributed; likely collaboration with Sidney Rigdon)

OVERVIEW

Lecture 5 of the Lectures on Faith, originally canonized in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, presents a systematic theology of the Godhead that differs significantly from both traditional Trinitarianism and later Mormon theology. The text asserts that the Godhead consists of two personages: the Father, described as a 'personage of spirit, glory and power,' and the Son, a 'personage of tabernacle' (flesh). The Holy Spirit is explicitly defined not as a personage, but as the 'mind' of the Father and the Son—the binding force or shared consciousness between them. Furthermore, the text advances a high view of human potential, arguing that Christ's sinless life demonstrated that 'it is in the power of man to keep the law and remain also without sin.' This lecture outlines a soteriology where believers, through obedience, come to possess this same 'mind' (the Spirit) and achieve a oneness with God identical to the oneness between the Father and the Son. Historically, this text represents an early 'Binitarian' stage in Mormon theology before the development of the anthropomorphic doctrine of God found in later revelations (e.g., D&C 130).

KEY FIGURES

The Father (Personage of Spirit), The Son (Personage of Tabernacle), The Holy Spirit (The Mind of the Father and Son), The Saint/Believer

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. BINITARIAN GODHEAD / IMPERSONAL SPIRIT

Assertion: The Godhead consists of two personages (Father and Son); the Holy Spirit is the 'mind' they share, not a person.

"There are two personages who constitute the great matchless, governing and supreme power... The Father... and the Son... possessing the same mind, which mind is the Holy Spirit."

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology asserts the Tripersonality of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons within one essence (Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14). Lecture 5 explicitly reduces the Godhead to 'two personages.' It redefines the Holy Spirit strictly as the 'mind' of the Father and Son, stripping the Spirit of personhood. This aligns more closely with Semi-Arianism or Pneumatomachian heresy than biblical Trinitarianism, which attributes will, grief, and intercession to the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30, Romans 8:26).

2. HUMAN PERFECTIBILITY

Assertion: Jesus kept the law to prove that humans have the innate power to be sinless.

"But notwithstanding all this, he kept the law of God, and remained without sin: Showing thereby that it is in the power of man to keep the law and remain also without sin."

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism teaches that while Jesus was sinless, His sinlessness attests to His divinity and qualifies Him as the perfect sacrifice, not that fallen humans can replicate His perfection (Romans 3:23, 1 John 1:8). Lecture 5 argues the opposite: that Christ's obedience serves as a proof-of-concept that humans possess the natural capacity ('power of man') to keep the law perfectly. This is a Pelagian view that diminishes the necessity of grace for daily living, suggesting sin is merely a failure of will rather than a condition of nature.

3. THE FATHER AS SPIRIT ONLY

Assertion: The Father is a personage of spirit, distinct from the Son who has a body (tabernacle).

"The Father being a personage of spirit, glory and power... The Son... a personage of tabernacle."

Evangelical Comparison: In a rare instance, this 1835 text aligns closer to the Evangelical view of the Father (John 4:24) than modern Mormonism does. However, within the context of Mormon theological evolution, this is a

critical anomaly. Later revelations (D&C 130:22, canonized later) claim the Father has a body of flesh and bones. Lecture 5 explicitly denies this by contrasting the Father (spirit) with the Son (tabernacle).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The theological gap is threefold. First, Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit is depersonalized into a shared 'mind' or force, violating the biblical presentation of the Spirit as a Person (John 16:13). Second, Anthropology: The text asserts a Pelagian view of human nature, claiming humans have the inherent power to be sinless, which negates the necessity of the Cross for daily failure and contradicts Romans 7. Third, Theology Proper: The definition of the Godhead as 'two personages' creates a fundamental incompatibility with the Nicene understanding of the Trinity.

Shared Values:

Divinity of Christ; Authority of the Bible (nominally); Necessity of Faith; Creation by the Son

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Trinity) – Denies the Trinity by asserting only two personages and depersonalizing the Holy Spirit.
- 2. [Critical] Anthropology (Total Depravity) – Claims humans have the power to keep the law and remain without sin.
- 3. [Major] Sola Gratia – If humans can be sinless, grace becomes a help for those who fail to use their power, rather than the only hope for the dead in sin.
- 4. [Major] Internal Consistency (Mormonism vs. Mormonism) – Contradicts later LDS scripture (D&C 130) regarding the Father having a body.

Semantic Warnings:

"Godhead"

In Text: Two personages (Father and Son) united by a shared mind (Spirit).
Evangelical: The Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three distinct persons in one essence.
Example: When Lecture 5 says 'these three are one,' it means they share a mind/purpose. When Evangelicals say it, they refer to ontological unity.

"Holy Spirit"

In Text: The 'mind' of the Father and Son; a substance or influence.
Evangelical: The Third Person of the Trinity, fully God, with distinct personhood.
Example: Lecture 5 calls the Spirit the 'mind' of the Father. The Bible shows the Spirit interceding *to* the Father (Romans 8:26).

"One"

In Text: United in purpose, mind, and glory (social unity).
Evangelical: One in essence/substance (ontological unity).
Example: The text uses John 17 to argue believers become 'one' exactly as the Father and Son are one, implying the Godhead's unity is merely a unity of agreement.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Becoming heirs of the heavenly kingdom, possessing the 'mind' of the Father, and becoming one with the Godhead.

How Attained: By believing on His name and keeping His commandments (which is claimed to be fully possible).

Basis of Assurance: The 'sure foundation' of knowing the nature of God and keeping His law.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text emphasizes 'faith' as a principle of power and action, but links salvation to the successful keeping of commandments, explicitly stating that law-keeping is within human power. This undermines Sola Fide by making full obedience a prerequisite possibility.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Believe on the name of Jesus Christ
2. Keep His commandments
3. Commit the paragraphs of the lecture to memory (pedagogical command)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Strive for sinless perfection, as it is claimed to be within human power
2. Seek to possess the 'mind' of God (the Spirit) through obedience

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism (implied via reference to Jesus' baptism)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. I noticed Lecture 5 says the Father is a 'personage of spirit.' How does that connect with the teaching that He has a body of flesh and bones?
2. This text says Jesus kept the law to show that 'it is in the power of man to keep the law and remain also without sin.' Do you feel you have the power to be sinless?
3. The Lecture describes the Holy Spirit as the 'mind' of the Father and Son. Do you view the Spirit as a person who can be grieved (Eph 4:30) or as a force/mind?
4. If this text was originally the 'Doctrine' in the Doctrine and Covenants, why was it removed?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Desire for Oneness – This highlights a genuine spiritual longing for union with God. The Gospel offers this not through becoming a god, but through adoption as children. [John 17:23, Romans 8:15-17 (Adoption vs. Apotheosis)]
2. The Mediator – We agree we need a Mediator. The difference is sufficiency. If we can keep the law (as the text says), the Mediator is less necessary. [1 Timothy 2:5]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism / Legalism [Severe] – By stating that Jesus proved it is 'in the power of man' to be sinless, the text removes the excuse of human frailty. Every sin becomes a deliberate refusal to use one's available power, leading to crushing guilt.
2. Theological Confusion [Moderate] – The adherent must reconcile this text (Father is Spirit) with modern temple ordinances (Father has a body), creating cognitive dissonance regarding the nature of the God they worship.
3. Uncertainty of Canon [Moderate] – Knowing that 'scripture' can be decanonized (as this was) undermines confidence in the permanence of current revelations.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Reasoned theology based on revelation and biblical synthesis.

Verification Method: Intellectual assent and memorization ('Let the student commit this paragraph to memory').

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology relies on the illumination of the Holy Spirit through the finished canon of Scripture (1 Corinthians 2:12-13), whereas this text relies on a specific modern prophetic formulation to define the nature of God.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1835 (Published in the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants)

Authorship: Traditionally Joseph Smith; critical scholarship suggests heavy involvement or primary authorship by Sidney Rigdon, though approved by Smith.

Textual Issues: These lectures were the 'Doctrine' part of the 'Doctrine and Covenants' until 1921, when they were decanonized by the LDS Church for theological inconsistencies with later revelations.