

SECTION 13 (MODERN D&C 42)

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

OVERVIEW

This text, originally received in February 1831 and canonized as Section 13 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 42 in modern editions), represents a pivotal moment in Mormon theology where the movement transitioned from a loose association of believers to a structured theocratic society. Often referred to as 'The Law,' it outlines the 'Law of Consecration,' requiring members to deed their property to the bishop for redistribution, establishing a communal economic system intended to build the 'New Jerusalem.' The text asserts absolute authority, equating the Book of Mormon with the Bible as containing the 'fulness of the gospel.' Theologically, it presents a rigorous legalism where salvation is explicitly tied to adherence to these new laws ('he that doeth according to these things, shall be saved'). It also establishes strict disciplinary procedures, mandating that unrepentant sinners be 'cast out,' and introduces the concept that certain sins (specifically murder) carry no forgiveness in this world or the next, a sharp divergence from classical Christian soteriology.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Joseph Smith (The Prophet), Sidney Rigdon (Leader/Scribe), Edward Partridge (First Bishop)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL SALVATION VIA LAW

Assertion: Salvation is contingent upon obeying the specific laws and ordinances revealed in this section.

"he that doeth according to these things, shall be saved, and he that doeth them not shall be damned (v16)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, salvation is a gift of grace received through faith, independent of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). This text, however, frames salvation as the reward for executing the 'law' provided in the revelation. Verse 16 explicitly states that the one who 'doeth according to these things' is the one who is saved. This reintroduces a covenant of works, where standing before God is determined by the adherent's ability to fulfill moral and economic requirements rather than resting on the finished work of Christ.

2. LAW OF CONSECRATION

Assertion: Believers must legally deed their property to the bishop, who then grants a stewardship back to them.

"consecrate of thy properties... with a covenant and a deed which cannot be broken... laid before the bishop (v8)"

Evangelical Comparison: While the New Testament encourages generosity and sharing (Acts 4), it does not mandate the legal transfer of all private property to church officers as a requirement for standing in the community. This doctrine establishes a theocratic economic system where the church hierarchy controls the material resources of the members, ostensibly to build a physical 'New Jerusalem.'

3. UNFORGIVABLE SIN (MURDER)

Assertion: Murderers have no forgiveness in this world or the world to come.

"Thou shalt not kill; and he that kills shall not have forgiveness, in this world, nor in the world to come. (v6)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical Christianity teaches that the only unforgivable sin is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (rejection of the Gospel). The Bible records the forgiveness/redemption of murderers (e.g., Moses, David, Paul). This text imposes a limit on the Atonement, claiming that the sin of murder places a person beyond the reach of Christ's forgiveness eternally.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the moral commands overlap with biblical ethics, the theological foundation is fundamentally different. This text establishes a 'Law' that must be obeyed for salvation (v16), effectively reinstating a Levitical-style system of ordinances, priesthood hierarchy, and strict legalism. The requirement to consecrate property to a bishop for salvation and the denial of forgiveness for murder create a chasm between this text and the Evangelical understanding of the infinite nature of Christ's atonement and justification by faith alone.

Shared Values:

Prohibition of murder, theft, and adultery; Care for the poor; Sanctity of marriage; Healing by faith/prayer

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is explicitly tied to 'doing' the law (v16).
2. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds the Book of Mormon and current revelations as binding law alongside the Bible (v5, v15).
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a mediating hierarchy (Bishop, Elders) with control over temporal assets.
4. [Critical] Christology (Sufficiency of Atonement) – Denies the efficacy of the Atonement for the sin of murder (v6).

Semantic Warnings:

"Salvation"

In Text: A state achieved by doing the works of the law and ordinances (v16).

Evangelical: Deliverance from sin and death granted solely by grace through faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8).

Example: *In v16, 'he that doeth... shall be saved' implies a works-based outcome.*

"The Gospel"

In Text: The composite teachings found in the Bible AND the Book of Mormon (v5), including these new laws.

Evangelical: The good news of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for sinners (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Example: *Verse 5 redefines the 'fulness of the gospel' to include the Book of Mormon.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Obedience to the law, resulting in being 'saved' (v16) and avoiding being 'cast out.'

How Attained: By 'doing according to these things' (works/obedience).

Basis of Assurance: Compliance with church laws and covenants.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Explicitly rejected. Verse 16 ('he that doeth... shall be saved') is the antithesis of Romans 4:5 ('to him that worketh not, but believeth... his faith is counted for righteousness').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Go forth preaching two by two (v2)
2. Consecrate properties to the bishop with a deed (v8)
3. Do not kill, steal, lie, or commit adultery (v7)
4. Love thy wife with all thy heart (v7)
5. Remember the poor (v8)
6. Do not be idle (v12)
7. Stand in the place of stewardship (v14)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's revelations as binding law
2. Submit to the Bishop's economic authority
3. Report sinners to the elders/church courts

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism with water (v2)
2. Laying on of hands for the sick (v12)
3. Ordination by authority (v4)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 16, it says 'he that doeth according to these things shall be saved.' How do you reconcile that with Ephesians 2:8-9 which says we are saved by grace through faith, not of works?
2. Verse 6 mentions that murder cannot be forgiven in this world or the next. How does that fit with the story of King David or the Apostle Paul, who were murderers yet found forgiveness?
3. The text places a heavy emphasis on being 'cast out' for various sins. How does this impact your sense of security in Christ?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Desire for a Holy Community (Zion) – The human heart longs for a society free from sin and poverty. This is promised in the New Heaven and New Earth, but it is achieved by God's power at the end of the age, not by human legalism or economic redistribution now. [Hebrews 11:10, Revelation 21:1-4]
2. Consecration/Sacrifice – The impulse to give everything to God is right, but we give ourselves as 'living sacrifices' in response to mercy, not to purchase standing. [Romans 12:1]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Legalism [Severe] – The believer is burdened with the knowledge that their salvation depends on their 'doing' (v16). Any failure in obedience threatens their eternal status.
2. Fear of Expulsion [Severe] – The phrase 'shall be cast out' is repeated multiple times (v7, v11, v20). This creates a culture of fear where social and spiritual exile is the immediate penalty for moral failure.
3. Financial Control [Moderate] – The requirement to deed property to the church creates a vulnerability and dependency on the hierarchy for one's livelihood (stewardship).

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation and the 'Spirit' given through the prayer of faith.

Verification Method: Asking God and receiving the Spirit; if one does not receive the Spirit, they are not to teach (v5).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests spirits against the objective standard of written Scripture (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). This text relies on subjective spiritual experience ('the Spirit shall be given') to validate new laws that contradict biblical soteriology.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: February 1831 (Published in 1835 D&C).

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated as revelation).

Textual Issues: This section is a composite of two separate revelations received on Feb 9 and Feb 23, 1831. It was later edited and combined for the 1835 publication.