

SECTION 43 (MODERN D&C 18)

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

OVERVIEW

This text, identified as Section 43 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 18 in modern editions), is a pivotal administrative and theological revelation given in June 1829. It serves a dual purpose: validating the newly translated Book of Mormon and establishing the hierarchy of the nascent church. The text explicitly commands Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer to 'search out' the Twelve Apostles, linking their calling to that of the Apostle Paul. Theologically, it articulates a distinct soteriology where Jesus Christ is described as having suffered the 'pain of all men' to enable repentance. However, it introduces a high-stakes conditional covenant: while the worth of souls is great, salvation is explicitly contingent upon keeping the commandments, baptism, and enduring to the end. The revelation asserts its own divine origin by claiming to be the direct voice of Jesus Christ, instructing the recipients that reading the words by the Spirit is equivalent to hearing God's voice, thus establishing a subjective epistemology for canonical authority.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith, Jr., Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, The Apostle Paul, The Twelve Apostles (Prophetic designation)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL SALVATION

Assertion: Salvation in the kingdom of the Father is contingent upon keeping the commandments after receiving the gospel.

"And after that you have received this, if you keep not my commandments, you cannot be saved in the kingdom of my Father."

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, salvation is a gift of grace received through faith, independent of works (Ephesians 2:8-9), and good works are the fruit, not the root, of salvation. This text inverts that order, stating explicitly that failure to keep commandments results in a loss of salvation ('you cannot be saved'). This establishes a probation-based soteriology where one's eternal status is perpetually at risk based on behavioral performance, rather than secured by the finished work of Christ.

2. SUBJECTIVE REVELATION AS AUTHORITY

Assertion: The text claims that the spiritual sensation of the words constitutes hearing the voice of God.

"testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words... for they are given by my Spirit unto you."

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism relies on the objective, historical revelation of Scripture (Sola Scriptura). This text introduces a subjective epistemology where internal spiritual confirmation ('manifested unto you by my Spirit') validates new propositional revelation. It equates the reading of Joseph Smith's words under spiritual influence with an auditory encounter with the Divine, thereby elevating Joseph's writings to the level of, or effectively above, the Bible.

3. UNIVERSAL BUT CONDITIONAL ATONEMENT

Assertion: Christ suffered the 'pain of all men' so that they 'might' repent.

"Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh: wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals affirm Christ bore the penalty of sin, this text emphasizes Christ suffering the 'pain' of humanity. This foreshadows later Mormon theology (Alma 7:11-12) where the Atonement is an empathetic experience of human infirmity, not just a legal transaction for sin. The purpose stated here is enabling repentance ('that all men might repent'), framing the Atonement as an enabling power for human action rather than a finished substitutionary work.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the text uses familiar Christian language (repentance, baptism, faith), it redefines the mechanism of salvation. In Evangelicalism, the believer is justified by faith and then obeys out of gratitude. In this text, the believer obeys ~~*in order to be*~~ saved ('if you keep not my commandments, you cannot be saved'). Furthermore, the text establishes a new ecclesiastical authority (the Twelve) and a new canon (the things written by Oliver/Joseph) as necessary for the 'fulness of the gospel,' implying the biblical gospel was insufficient or lost.

Shared Values:

The Great Commission (Evangelism); The necessity of Repentance; The value of the human soul; Jesus as Redeemer and Lord

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Salvation is explicitly conditioned on future obedience and commandment-keeping.
2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Grace is mentioned ('my grace is sufficient'), but the context demands 'walk uprightly... and sin not' as a prerequisite for the apostles.
3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts new revelation through Joseph Smith is equal to God's voice and necessary for the church.

Semantic Warnings:

"Saved"

In Text: Conditional state achieved by keeping commandments, baptism, and enduring to the end.

Evangelical: Justification by grace through faith, a present possession of the believer (Ephesians 2:8, Romans 5:1).

Example: Verse 7: 'if you keep not my commandments, you cannot be saved' vs. Acts 16:31 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'

"Church of Christ"

In Text: The specific organization being established by Joseph Smith.

Evangelical: The universal body of all believers in Jesus Christ across all time and denominations.

Example: The text implies only this specific foundation constitutes the true church.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Entrance into the 'kingdom of my Father' (Exaltation/Heaven).

How Attained: Faith, Repentance, Baptism, Enduring to the End, and strict obedience to commandments.

Basis of Assurance: There is no assurance of present salvation; assurance is prospective, based on future diligence.

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly refutes Sola Fide in verse 7. A believer cannot be saved by faith alone if they fail to keep commandments.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Rely upon the things which are written (Book of Mormon)
2. Build up the church
3. Cry repentance unto this people
4. Search out the Twelve Apostles (Command to Oliver and David)
5. Keep my commandments in all things
6. Take upon you the name of Christ
7. Speak the truth in soberness

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's revelations as the voice of Jesus
2. Validate the Book of Mormon as foundational truth

3. Submit to the developing hierarchy (Twelve Apostles)

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism by immersion (implied by 'according to that which is written')
2. Ordination of priests and teachers

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 7, it says 'if you keep not my commandments, you cannot be saved.' How do you interpret that in light of human imperfection? Does this cause you anxiety?
2. The text says the 'worth of souls is great.' What makes a soul worthy in your view? Is it their potential to become a god, or because Christ died for them?
3. Verse 1 says the 'gates of hell shall not prevail.' If the primitive church fell into total apostasy (necessitating a restoration), didn't the gates of hell prevail for 1,800 years?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Worth of Souls – This is a powerful bridge to the Gospel. We agree souls are infinitely valuable. Why? Because God created them and Christ died for them. [Romans 5:8 ('God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.')]
2. Joy in Evangelism – Christians share this desire to see others saved. The motivation is the difference: we share the gospel out of gratitude for salvation already received, not to secure our own place in the kingdom. [Luke 15:7 (Joy in heaven over one sinner who repents)]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism / Fear of Failure [Severe] – The explicit threat that failing to keep commandments results in losing salvation creates a 'treadmill' spirituality. The believer can never rest, as their eternal destiny is always contingent on their next action.
2. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The command to 'labor all your days' combined with the conditional promise of joy creates a burden where spiritual self-worth is tied to evangelistic output.
3. Epistemic Isolation [Severe] – By defining the 'voice of God' as an internal feeling confirming the text, the adherent is isolated from objective external critique. To question the text is to deny one's own spiritual experiences.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Pneumatic Subjectivism (Spiritual witness validating text)

Verification Method: Adherents are told that if they read by the power of the Spirit, they can testify they have 'heard [God's] voice.'

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests spirits against the objective standard of Scripture (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). This text creates a circular loop where the text tells the reader that their spiritual feelings confirm the text is God's voice.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: June 1829 (Published in 1835 D&C as Section 43; Modern D&C 18).

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated revelation).

Textual Issues: This text was edited between the 1833 Book of Commandments and the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants to reflect a more developed hierarchy (adding the calling of the Twelve).