

SECTION 47 (MODERN D&C 22)

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

OVERVIEW

This revelation, originally received in April 1830 and cataloged as Section 47 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 22 in modern editions), addresses a critical ecclesiological crisis in the nascent Mormon movement. Several individuals who had previously been baptized in Baptist or Restorationist (Campbellite) congregations desired to join Joseph Smith's church without undergoing a new baptism, believing their prior confession of Christ was sufficient. In this text, Joseph Smith speaks in the voice of the Lord to categorically reject the validity of all non-Mormon Christian ordinances. The text asserts that 'all old covenants' are done away with and that the 'new and everlasting covenant' has been established. It equates previous Christian baptisms with the 'law of Moses' and 'dead works,' arguing that without the specific authority restored through Smith, no ordinance has saving efficacy. This text is historically significant as it marks the definitive boundary line where Mormonism ceased to view itself as a reforming movement within Christianity and established itself as the exclusive possessor of saving authority, rendering all other Christian traditions invalid.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (Speaker), Joseph Smith (Revelator), Prospective Converts (Target Audience)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. EXCLUSIVITY OF PRIESTHOOD AUTHORITY

Assertion: Baptisms performed by other Christian denominations are invalid 'dead works' because they lack the specific authority restored to Joseph Smith.

"although a man should be baptized an hundred times, it availeth him nothing; for you cannot enter in at the straight gate... by your dead works"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the validity of baptism rests on the command of Christ (Matthew 28:19) and the faith of the believer. It is an outward sign of an inward grace. This text, however, shifts the locus of validity from the believer's faith and Christ's command to the administrator's authority. By labeling other Christian baptisms as 'dead works' and equating them with the 'law of Moses,' the text asserts that no amount of faith in Jesus Christ is sufficient for salvation without submission to the specific hierarchy established by Joseph Smith. This violates the concept of the Universal Priesthood of Believers.

2. THE NEW AND EVERLASTING COVENANT

Assertion: The restoration of the gospel through Joseph Smith constitutes a new covenant that supersedes all existing Christian covenants.

"all old covenants have I caused to be done away in this thing, and this is a new and an everlasting covenant"

Evangelical Comparison: Biblically, the 'New Covenant' is ratified by the death of Christ and is the final dispensation of grace (Hebrews 8:6-13). There is no expectation in the New Testament of a subsequent 'new' covenant to replace the one made in Christ's blood. This text claims that the covenant established in 1830 is the 'new and everlasting' one, implying that the covenant operative in historic Christianity had become 'old' or obsolete, effectively relegating the Church Age to the status of the Old Testament era.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the doctrine of the Church (Ecclesiology) and the means of Grace. Evangelicalism holds that the Church is the universal body of believers united by faith in Christ, and that baptism is a testimony of that faith. This text asserts that the Church is a specific institutional organization established in 1830 and that ordinances are only valid if performed by its priesthood. This creates a 'restorationist' gap: the belief that the true church ceased to exist and had to be restored, rendering all intervening Christianity invalid. This directly contradicts Jesus' promise that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church (Matthew 16:18).

Shared Values:

Necessity of Baptism (though definitions differ); Belief in a 'Straight Gate'; Rejection of 'dead works' (though definitions differ)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Universal Priesthood – Denies the validity of any ministry or ordinance outside the specific Mormon hierarchy.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Makes salvation/entry into the kingdom dependent on a specific ritual work (authorized baptism) rather than faith alone.
3. [Major] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – Implies Christ's work through the historic church was a failure ('dead works') requiring a new restoration.

Semantic Warnings:

"Dead Works"

In Text: Christian baptisms and ordinances performed without Mormon priesthood authority.

Evangelical: Actions performed to earn salvation apart from faith, or sinful behaviors (Hebrews 6:1, 9:14).

Example: *In this text, a sincere Baptist baptism is a 'dead work.' In the Bible, a 'dead work' is trying to keep the law to be justified.*

"New and Everlasting Covenant"

In Text: The fullness of the gospel as restored through Joseph Smith (specifically including priesthood ordinances).

Evangelical: The covenant of grace established by Jesus' blood (Hebrews 13:20).

Example: *The text claims the 1830 organization is the 'new' covenant, implying the biblical New Covenant was insufficient or lost.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Entering the 'straight gate' through the authorized church.

How Attained: Through faith in Christ PLUS the specific ordinance of baptism by proper authority.

Basis of Assurance: Confidence in the authority of the priesthood holder performing the ordinance.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide by stating that faith without the specific authorized ritual 'availeth him nothing.'

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Enter ye in at the gate (be baptized into the Mormon church)
2. Seek not to counsel your God

Implicit Obligations:

1. Renounce the validity of previous Christian experiences
2. Accept Joseph Smith as the sole channel for authorized ordinances

Ritual Requirements:

1. Re-baptism by proper authority

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When this passage calls previous Christian baptisms 'dead works,' what does that imply about the sincerity of those believers' faith?
2. Does God look at the authority of the person baptizing, or the heart of the person being baptized?
3. If a person has true faith in Jesus but wasn't baptized by a Mormon elder, does this text mean their faith 'availeth them nothing'?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Straight Gate – The text correctly identifies that there is a narrow way to life. However, Jesus defines Himself as the gate/door, not a specific church organization. [John 10:9 ('I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved')]
2. Dead Works – We agree that religious rituals performed without faith or to earn salvation are dead. The Gospel offers life through the Spirit, not just new rituals. [Hebrews 9:14 (Christ's blood purges conscience from dead works to serve the living God)]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Invalidation of Experience [Severe] – The believer is told that all their previous spiritual experiences, answered prayers, and moments of connection with God in other churches were 'dead' and invalid. This creates a deep sense of spiritual insecurity and isolation from the broader Christian family.
2. Institutional Dependency [Moderate] – Salvation is tied strictly to the institution. If the institution is wrong, the believer has no access to the 'straight gate.' This creates immense pressure to conform to leadership ('seek not to counsel your God').

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (Vertical Authority).

Verification Method: Obedience to the command ('seek not to counsel your God').

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology tests spirits against Scripture (1 John 4:1, Acts 17:11). This text discourages questioning ('seek not to counsel your God') and demands submission to the new revelation over and against previous biblical understanding.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Originally Section 47 in the 1835 edition; renumbered to Section 22 in modern editions. The text reflects the immediate post-organization period of the church.