

SECTION 7

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

OVERVIEW

Historically known as the 'Olive Leaf,' this revelation (now Doctrine and Covenants 88) was sent by Joseph Smith to saints in Missouri as a message of peace, yet it contains some of the most complex theology in Mormonism. It begins by asserting that the 'Light of Christ' is the cosmic power governing the physical universe (sun, moon, stars) and is the law by which all things are governed. The text expounds on the three kingdoms of glory (Celestial, Terrestrial, Telestial), asserting that the level of glory a resurrected being receives is strictly determined by the law they were willing to abide by during mortality. It details the sanctification of the earth itself, which will eventually become a Celestial kingdom. The latter half establishes the 'School of the Prophets,' instituting strict behavioral codes (ceasing laughter, waking early) and a specific ritual of washing feet and formal salutations to purify the leadership for the impending eschatological judgments.

KEY FIGURES

The Lord (Jesus Christ), God the Father, The Holy Spirit of Promise, Michael (The Archangel/Seventh Angel), Seven Angels (Trumpeters), School of the Prophets (Collective)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE LIGHT OF CHRIST (COSMOLOGY)

Assertion: Christ is the light in the sun, moon, and stars, and the power by which they were made; this light fills the immensity of space and governs all things.

"As also he is in the sun, and the light of the sun... The light which is in all things; which giveth life to all things; which is the law by which all things are governed"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, God is the Creator who sustains the universe (Colossians 1:17), but He is ontologically distinct from the creation. He is not 'in' the sun or the moon in a physical or metaphysical substance sense. This text conflates the uncreated God with the created order, suggesting the 'Light of Christ' is a substance filling the immensity of space that gives life and law to matter. This moves away from the biblical Creator/creature distinction toward a form of materialism or panentheism.

2. MERIT-BASED KINGDOMS OF GLORY

Assertion: Resurrected bodies receive glory (Celestial, Terrestrial, or Telestial) corresponding exactly to the law they were able to abide by.

"For he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom, cannot abide a celestial glory... therefore, he is not meet for a kingdom of glory."

Evangelical Comparison: The text explicitly ties eternal destiny to law-keeping ('abiding the law'). In contrast, the Evangelical doctrine of Sola Fide (Faith Alone) asserts that no human can abide the law of God (Romans 3:23) and that righteousness is imputed by Christ, not achieved by the believer's capacity to obey. This text constructs a soteriology where Christ provides the resurrection (general salvation), but the believer's obedience determines their quality of eternal life (exaltation).

3. DEIFICATION (THEOSIS)

Assertion: Saints will be made equal with God and possess all things.

"The saints shall be filled with his glory, and receive their inheritance and be made equal with him."

Evangelical Comparison: The claim that saints will be 'made equal with him' suggests an ontological elevation of the human to the divine status. Biblical Christianity maintains that while believers are joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), God alone possesses the unique attributes of deity (aseity, omnipotence, omniscience) inherently. The creature never becomes the Creator or His equal.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and the nature of God. This text posits that the universe is governed by law and that human destiny is determined by which law one can 'abide.' This is a system of exaltation by works/merit, even if enabled by Christ's light. Evangelicalism teaches that no one can abide the law, necessitating a substitutionary atonement where Christ's righteousness is imputed, not infused or emulated to the point of equality with God. Furthermore, the text's cosmology (Christ as the physical light in the sun) blurs the Creator/creature distinction essential to biblical theism.

Shared Values:

Belief in the resurrection of the dead.; Importance of prayer and fasting.; Second Coming of Christ.; Moral living (avoiding lust, covetousness).

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Eternal destiny is determined by the 'law' one abides by, not solely by faith in Christ.
2. [Critical] Theology Proper (Nature of God) – Teaches Christ is the physical light/power in celestial bodies and that humans can be 'equal' with Him.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Introduces new ordinances (washing of feet) and eschatology not found in the Bible.

Semantic Warnings:

"Sanctification"

In Text: The process of abiding by law to prepare the body for a specific degree of glory.

Evangelical: The work of the Holy Spirit making the believer more like Christ, following justification, not a prerequisite for salvation.

Example: *In this text: 'They who are not sanctified through the law... must inherit another kingdom.' In Bible: Sanctification is a fruit of salvation, not the cause of the level of glory.*

"Light of Christ"

In Text: A physical/spiritual energy filling the universe, giving life and law to all things (sun, moon, stars).

Evangelical: Often refers to the truth/revelation Christ brings (John 1:9) or His moral purity, not a cosmic substance.

"Salvation/Redemption"

In Text: Often refers to the universal resurrection (free to all), distinct from 'Exaltation' (Celestial glory).

Evangelical: Deliverance from sin and hell to eternal life with God (unified concept).

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Universal resurrection ('redemption of the soul') for all; 'Celestial Glory' for those who abide the highest law.

How Attained: Resurrection by Christ's power; Glory/Exaltation by abiding the law, sanctification, and ordinances.

Basis of Assurance: Personal revelation ('Holy Spirit of promise') and successful performance of duties/rituals.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide by stating 'he who is not able to abide the law... cannot abide a celestial glory.' (Contrast with Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Organize and establish a house of God (Temple/School).
2. Cease from light speeches, laughter, and lustful desires.
3. Retire to bed early and arise early.
4. Seek learning by study and by faith.

5. Wash feet as an ordinance.
6. Use a specific, word-for-word salutation with uplifted hands.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Achieve sanctification through strict obedience to law.
2. Become 'clean from the blood of this generation' through warning others.
3. Master the 'doctrine of the kingdom' to prepare for missionary service.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Ordinance of washing of feet (administered by the president).
2. Solemn assembly.
3. Ritual salutation/covenant of fellowship with uplifted hands.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text says we must 'abide the law of a celestial kingdom' to receive that glory. How do you handle the moments when you fail to abide by that law perfectly?
2. What does it mean to you when the text says saints will be 'made equal' with Jesus?
3. This section commands ceasing from 'excess of laughter.' How do you interpret that in your daily walk with God?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for a 'House of Order' – Humans long for order amidst chaos. The Gospel provides the ultimate order not through our organizing, but through Christ bringing us into His Kingdom. [1 Corinthians 14:33 (God is not author of confusion)]
2. The longing for Light – We all sense a need for illumination. Jesus is the Light of the World, but He gives us light by His presence, not as a physical force in matter. [John 8:12]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Perfectionism/Legalism [Severe] – The text demands strict control over behavior (sleep, laughter, speech) and links eternal glory to the ability to 'abide the law.' This creates immense pressure to perform to secure one's place in the Celestial Kingdom.
2. Uncertainty [Moderate] – Since glory is tiered and based on merit, the adherent can never be fully sure if they have done enough to qualify for the highest tier until the judgment.
3. Works-Righteousness [Severe] – The requirement to be 'clean from the blood of this generation' places the responsibility of others' salvation on the adherent's diligence in warning them.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation through the prophet, supplemented by intellectual study.

Verification Method: Experience of the 'Holy Spirit of promise' and the eventual literal seeing of God's face for the sanctified.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicalism relies on the objective standard of the written Word (Bible) for truth (2 Timothy 3:16), whereas this text blends subjective mystical experience with a command to seek secular knowledge.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: December 27-28, 1832 and January 3, 1833.

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: Composite revelation (originally two separate dictations combined). The 'Olive Leaf' letter context is crucial for understanding the tone.