

SECTION 73 (MODERN SECTION 74)

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

OVERVIEW

This text, originally published as Section 73 in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants (Section 74 in modern editions), presents Joseph Smith's authoritative interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:14. The text addresses the status of children born to mixed-faith marriages (believer and unbeliever). While the biblical text of 1 Corinthians 7 discusses the sanctifying influence of a believing spouse on the family unit, Smith's revelation recontextualizes the passage entirely. It asserts that the 'unclean' status mentioned by Paul referred specifically to children being subjected to the Law of Moses and circumcision by an unbelieving Jewish father. The revelation claims that Paul's instruction was a specific command to avoid being 'united' with unbelievers who insisted on Mosaic traditions. Theologically, it establishes a core tenet of Mormonism: that little children are inherently holy and sanctified through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, explicitly rejecting the concept of original sin or the need for covenantal inclusion rituals (like circumcision or infant baptism) to make them holy.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ, The Apostle Paul, Unbelieving Husband, Unbelieving Wife, Little Children

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. INNOCENCE OF CHILDREN

Assertion: Little children are holy and sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ automatically, and are not 'unclean' by nature.

"little children are holy being sanctified through the atonement of Jesus Christ"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology, grounded in Romans 5 and Psalm 51, teaches that all humans inherit a sin nature from Adam (Original Sin), necessitating regeneration. While Evangelicals believe God is merciful to those who die in infancy, they do not claim children are born 'holy' or 'sanctified' by default. This text asserts that the Atonement automatically sanctifies all children, rendering them holy without faith or repentance, effectively teaching a form of universalism for those under the age of accountability.

2. PROPHETIC HERMENEUTICS

Assertion: The Prophet has the authority to reveal the 'true' historical context of biblical scripture, even if it contradicts the plain reading or historical consensus.

"wherefore, for this cause the apostle wrote unto the church... and this is what the scriptures mean."

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelicalism, Scripture is interpreted through the grammatical-historical method—letting the text speak in its original context. Joseph Smith here imposes a context (Judaizers/Circumcision) onto a letter written to Corinth (a Gentile city) regarding mixed marriages. This doctrine establishes that the 'Prophet's' interpretation supersedes the biblical text's actual historical setting.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in Anthropology and Bibliology. Anthropologically, this text asserts that humans (infants) are born holy and sanctified, whereas Evangelicalism teaches that all are born in Adam with a need for redemption (Ephesians 2:3). Bibliologically, the text demonstrates a 'corrective' approach to the Bible, where Joseph Smith alters the meaning of the text to fit his theology, rather than deriving theology from the text. The assertion that 1 Corinthians 7 is about circumcision is historically untenable, creating a gap between Mormon revelation and verifiable history.

Shared Values:

The Atonement of Jesus Christ is central to sanctification.; The Law of Moses is fulfilled and no longer binding.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – The text claims the Bible is misunderstood without this extra-biblical revelation, effectively rewriting the context of 1 Corinthians.
2. [Major] Anthropology (Doctrine of Man) – Denies Original Sin by asserting children are born holy and sanctified.

Semantic Warnings:

"Sanctified"

In Text: A state of automatic holiness granted to children by the Atonement, removing the 'unclean' status of tradition.

Evangelical: The process of being made holy, set apart for God's use; in 1 Cor 7:14, it refers to a 'federal' or covenantal holiness due to the presence of a believer, not necessarily internal salvation.

Example: *In this text, 'sanctified' means the child is sinless. In 1 Cor 7:14, 'sanctified' means the unbelieving spouse and children are set apart/legitimate because of the believing parent.*

"Holy"

In Text: Innocent, without sin, redeemed automatically.

Evangelical: Set apart, distinct, consecrated (hagios).

Example: *The text says children are 'holy' meaning they need no baptism/repentance. The Bible calls the temple furniture 'holy,' meaning it is set apart for God.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: For children, it is an automatic state of holiness through the Atonement.

How Attained: By virtue of birth and the Atonement (for children); no faith required.

Basis of Assurance: The revelation that the Atonement covers all ignorance and childhood.

Comparison to Sola Fide: This text teaches salvation without faith for a specific class of humans (children), whereas Sola Fide insists that justification is always by faith (though Evangelicals trust God's mercy for infants, they do not claim infants possess intrinsic holiness).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Do not subject children to the Law of Moses (circumcision).
2. Do not believe the tradition that little children are unholy.

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's interpretation of the Bible as superior to the biblical text itself.
2. Reject the doctrine of Original Sin regarding infants.

Ritual Requirements:

1. None explicitly commanded in this text, but the rejection of circumcision implies a rejection of Old Covenant rituals.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When you read 1 Corinthians 7:12-13, Paul explicitly tells the believer *not* to divorce the unbeliever. How does that fit with D&C 74:3 saying Paul commanded them *not* to be united?
2. Do you think the issues in Corinth (a Greek city) were the same as the issues in Jerusalem regarding circumcision?
3. If children are born 'holy' and 'sanctified,' why do we need to be born again?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Sanctification by the Atonement – We agree that sanctification comes only through Christ's Atonement, not through rituals like circumcision. [Hebrews 10:10]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Confusion/Cognitive Dissonance [Moderate] – The believer is forced to accept an interpretation that directly contradicts the plain reading of the Bible (Paul says 'stay,' D&C says 'Paul said separate'). This erodes trust in one's own ability to read Scripture.
2. False Security [Moderate] – Believing children are inherently holy may lead to a diminished urgency in praying for their regeneration and conversion, assuming they are safe until a certain age (8 years old in LDS tradition).

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Acceptance of the Prophet's testimony regarding history and theology.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the public, preserved text of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). This text relies on a private, gnostic-style insight into history that lacks external verification.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: 1830 (Published in 1835 D&C)

Authorship: Joseph Smith

Textual Issues: The text claims to explain 1 Corinthians 7:14 but introduces a historical context (circumcision) that is foreign to the epistle's actual setting (Corinth).