

OFFICIAL DECLARATION 2

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Official Declaration 2 | VOLUME: Doctrine and Covenants | AUTHOR: The First Presidency (Spencer W. Kimball, N. Eldon Tanner, Marion G. Romney)

OVERVIEW

Official Declaration 2, canonized in the Doctrine and Covenants, represents a pivotal moment in modern Mormon history. Dated June 8, 1978, it formally announces that Church President Spencer W. Kimball received a revelation extending priesthood and temple blessings to all worthy male members, regardless of race or color. Prior to this, Black men of African descent were barred from the priesthood, and Black men and women were barred from temple endowments and sealing ordinances—rites considered essential for 'exaltation' (the highest degree of salvation) in Mormon theology. The text frames this change not as a correction of past error, but as the fulfillment of a 'long-promised day' and a result of divine timing. The introductory material (included in the input) attempts to contextualize the ban by stating records offer 'no clear insights' into its origins, despite historical statements by early leaders linking it to lineage and pre-mortal conduct. For the believer, this text validates the concept of continuing revelation, asserting that the prophet can modify fundamental church practice and doctrine under God's direction.

KEY FIGURES

Spencer W. Kimball, God (referenced as the source of revelation), N. Eldon Tanner, Marion G. Romney, Black members of African descent

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONTINUING REVELATION

Assertion: God reveals new instructions to the President of the Church that can supersede previous policies or doctrines.

"Church leaders believed that a revelation from God was needed to alter this practice... The revelation came to Church President Spencer W. Kimball"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the canon is closed (Jude 1:3), and the requirements for salvation (faith in Christ) are immutable and universal since the cross. Official Declaration 2 rests on the premise that God dispenses administrative permissions for salvation ordinances based on the era. This creates a theological system where truth is progressive and subject to the current prophet, rather than anchored solely in the finished work of Christ and the fixed authority of the Bible.

2. PRIESTHOOD NECESSITY

Assertion: Holding the priesthood is a requisite blessing for full participation in God's plan.

"The revelation removed all restrictions with regard to race that once applied to the priesthood."

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism teaches that the veil was torn and all believers have direct access to God through Christ (Hebrews 4:16, 1 Peter 2:9). Mormonism, as evidenced here, teaches that specific authority (Priesthood) must be conferred by man to man to perform ordinances. The text implies that without this 'blessing,' a specific demographic was spiritually limited, denying the sufficiency of Christ's atonement to grant full standing to all believers immediately upon faith.

3. CONDITIONAL WORTHINESS

Assertion: Access to priesthood and temple blessings is contingent upon personal worthiness.

"The revelation removed all restrictions... [allowing ordination of] all worthy male members."

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals believe in the pursuit of holiness (sanctification), standing before God is based on the imputed righteousness of Christ (Romans 4:5). This text reinforces the Mormon concept that access to the 'Holy of Holies' (Temple/Priesthood) is gated by human performance ('worthiness'), rather than solely by the blood of Jesus.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the sufficiency of Christ. Evangelicalism holds that at the moment of Christ's death, the veil was torn, and the 'middle wall of partition' (Ephesians 2:14) was broken down, granting all believers immediate access to the priesthood of believers. OD2 operates on the premise that the 'wall' remained for Black people until 1978 and could only be removed by a modern prophet. This implies that Christ's atonement was administratively limited by the Church, making the Prophet the gatekeeper of salvation rather than Christ the open door.

Shared Values:

Rejection of racism (in the modern context); Desire for unity in the faith; Importance of prayer

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds a modern administrative document to the canon of scripture, claiming it carries divine authority equal to the Bible.
2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Reaffirms a hierarchical, gendered, and (formerly) racial priesthood necessary for salvation ordinances.
3. [Major] Immutability of God – Implies God changes His requirements for salvation and His acceptance of people groups based on the calendar year.
4. [Critical] Sola Fide – Maintains that 'worthiness' (works/obedience) is a prerequisite for the authority necessary for exaltation.

Semantic Warnings:

"Priesthood"

In Text: The exclusive authority and power of God delegated to man to act in His name for the salvation of the human family.

Evangelical: The status of all believers who have direct access to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5-9).

Example: In OD2, 'priesthood' is a credential granted to worthy males. In the Bible, it is the birthright of every born-again believer.

"Worthy"

In Text: Morally eligible based on adherence to church laws (Word of Wisdom, tithing, chastity) to receive ordinances.

Evangelical: A status granted solely by Christ's imputed righteousness, not personal merit (Revelation 4:11, 5:9 - only the Lamb is worthy).

Example: OD2 speaks of 'worthy male members.' The Bible teaches 'no one is righteous, not even one' (Romans 3:10) apart from Christ.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined as 'Exaltation'—which requires Priesthood and Temple ordinances.

How Attained: Through faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Priesthood (for men) and Temple ordinances (for all), contingent on worthiness.

Basis of Assurance: Reliance on the Prophet's revelation to open the door, and personal worthiness to walk through it.

Comparison to Sola Fide: OD2 reinforces a sacramental soteriology where the Church controls the means of grace (priesthood). Sola Fide asserts that faith in Christ immediately grants all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3) without human mediation.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Ordain worthy male members to the priesthood regardless of race
2. Allow temple admission to worthy members regardless of race

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept the President of the Church as the mouthpiece of God
2. Accept the change in doctrine without necessarily understanding the origin of the previous ban
3. Maintain personal 'worthiness' to access these blessings

Ritual Requirements:

1. Priesthood ordination (conferral by laying on of hands)
2. Baptism (mentioned as historical context)
3. Temple ordinances (implied by the removal of restrictions)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The introduction says records offer 'no clear insights' into the ban's origin, but didn't Brigham Young teach it was because of the Curse of Cain? How do you reconcile the text's claim with historical records?
2. If the priesthood is essential for salvation, what happened to the Black men who died before 1978? Was Christ's atonement insufficient for them during their lifetime?
3. Does God change His mind about who is worthy to serve Him, or did the Church leaders misunderstand God for 126 years?
4. In the Bible, the veil of the temple tore when Jesus died (Matthew 27:51). Why did the LDS church have to wait until 1978 to open the temple to everyone?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Long-Promised Day – This longing for a day of freedom and acceptance mirrors the biblical promise of the Messiah. However, the Gospel declares that 'Today is the day of salvation' (2 Corinthians 6:2). [Galatians 4:4-7 (In the fullness of time, God sent His Son... we are no longer slaves but sons).]
2. All are alike unto God – This is a true biblical principle. The Gospel bridge is that because all are alike, all are equally sinful and equally savable by faith alone, without waiting for administrative permission. [Romans 3:22-24 (Righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference...)]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Cognitive Dissonance / Uncertainty [Severe] – The believer must accept that God commanded (or allowed) a racist policy for over a century, then changed it. This creates a fear: What other 'eternal truths' might change tomorrow? It erodes trust in the immutability of God's character.
2. Performance / Worthiness [Moderate] – The text emphasizes 'worthy male members.' The burden of maintaining 'worthiness' to hold the priesthood creates a treadmill of works-righteousness, where one's standing with God is never settled but always contingent on the latest interview.
3. Institutional Dependence [Severe] – The believer is taught that they cannot fully access God's blessings without the permission of the Church hierarchy. If the Church withholds the priesthood (as it did pre-1978), the individual is helpless.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Mystical/Subjective Revelation (The feelings/impressions of the Prophet confirmed to his counselors).

Verification Method: Adherents are expected to pray for a spiritual confirmation (burning in the bosom) that the prophet has received this revelation.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests prophecy against written Scripture (Acts 17:11, Isaiah 8:20). Here, the test is internal consistency with the current prophet's claim, effectively placing the prophet above the Bible.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: June 8, 1978 (Letter); 2013 (Edition of Introduction)

Authorship: Spencer W. Kimball (President), N. Eldon Tanner, Marion G. Romney.

Textual Issues: The introductory text ('Church records offer no clear insights...') is a modern redaction/commentary added to distance the church from previous racist teachings. It is not part of the original 1978 letter but is presented as authoritative context.