

SECTION 1

FAITH: Mormonism | TEXT: Doctrine and Covenants | VOLUME: 2013 | AUTHOR: Joseph Smith

OVERVIEW

Section 1 of the Doctrine and Covenants, received on November 1, 1831, functions as the Lord's formal 'Preface' to the collection of revelations given to Joseph Smith. It establishes the fundamental premise of the Restoration: that the world had strayed entirely from God's ordinances and broken the everlasting covenant (the Great Apostasy). Consequently, God called Joseph Smith to restore the fullness of the gospel and establish the 'only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth.' The text issues a universal warning to all inhabitants of the earth to prepare for the Second Coming and judgment. Crucially, it establishes a new epistemological standard for the movement: the voice of the Lord's servants (specifically the prophets) is equated with the voice of the Lord himself. It warns that those who do not heed these new revelations will be 'cut off' from the people. The text emphasizes that forgiveness is contingent upon repenting and 'doing' the commandments, setting a tone of legal obligation alongside its missional urgency.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Joseph Smith, Jr., Disciples/Elders of the Church, Inhabitants of the Earth (The Audience)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE GREAT APOSTASY

Assertion: Traditional Christianity has completely corrupted the gospel, strayed from ordinances, and worships an idol rather than the true God.

"For they have strayed from mine ordinances, and have broken mine everlasting covenant... every man walketh in his own way, and after the image of his own god... whose substance is that of an idol (D&C 1:15-16)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicalism teaches that while the visible church may err, the gates of hell shall not prevail against the true Church (Matt 16:18) and that the faith was 'once for all delivered to the saints' (Jude 1:3). D&C 1 asserts a total rupture where the 'everlasting covenant' was broken and lost, necessitating a restoration. This doctrine invalidates all previous Christian baptisms, ordinations, and confessions, categorizing historical Christianity as idolatry ('substance is that of an idol').

2. ECCLESIOLOGICAL EXCLUSIVITY

Assertion: The LDS Church is the only valid church on earth.

"the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased (D&C 1:30)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology defines the 'true church' as the invisible body of all true believers who are justified by faith in Christ, regardless of denominational affiliation (Ephesians 4:4-6). D&C 1:30 restricts the 'true and living church' to a specific institutional organization established through Joseph Smith, effectively un-churching all other Christians.

3. PROPHETIC AUTHORITY / OPEN CANON

Assertion: The words of Mormon prophets are equal in authority to God's direct speech.

"whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same (D&C 1:38)"

Evangelical Comparison: Sola Scriptura holds that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith. D&C 1:38 creates a mechanism for an open canon where the current prophetic utterance is binding and authoritative, potentially superseding previous revelation. This equates the 'voice of servants' (Joseph Smith and successors) with the 'voice of God,' removing the biblical safeguard of testing all things against the closed canon of Scripture.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the 'Great Apostasy' narrative. D&C 1 asserts that the 'everlasting covenant' was broken and lost, rendering traditional Christianity void of authority and salvation. Evangelicalism holds that the New Covenant is unbreakable because it is founded on Christ's blood, not human administration (Hebrews 13:20). Furthermore, D&C 1 introduces a conditional forgiveness based on 'doing the commandments' (v32), contrasting sharply with the Evangelical doctrine of Justification by Faith Alone (Sola Fide), where forgiveness is a gift received, not a wage earned through obedience.

Shared Values:

Belief in the Second Coming of Christ; Necessity of repentance; God's omniscience ('eyes are upon all men'); Rejection of worldly idolatry

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Asserts new, binding revelation that supersedes the Bible and equates the prophet's voice with God's.
2. [Major] Sola Fide – Conditions forgiveness on 'doing the commandments' (v32) rather than faith alone.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Claims exclusive authority for a specific hierarchy, denying the priesthood of all believers.

Semantic Warnings:

"Ordinances"

In Text: Essential rituals (like baptism, confirmation, priesthood ordination) required for salvation/exaltation, which must be performed by LDS authority.

Evangelical: Sacraments (Baptism/Communion) that are outward signs of inward grace or memorials, not legalistic requirements for justification.

Example: *D&C 1:15 'strayed from mine ordinances' implies that changing the ritual invalidates the covenant.*

"Church"

In Text: The specific institutional organization led by Joseph Smith and his successors.

Evangelical: The universal body of all true believers in Jesus Christ.

Example: *D&C 1:30 'the only true and living church'.*

"Saints"

In Text: Members of the LDS Church.

Evangelical: All who are sanctified in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:2).

Example: *D&C 1:36 'Lord shall have power over his saints'.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined here as escaping the wrath to come (v9) and being part of the 'only true church' (v30).

How Attained: By hearkening to the prophets, repenting, and 'doing the commandments' (v32).

Basis of Assurance: Assurance is tentative, based on whether one is 'doing' the commandments sufficiently, as God cannot look on sin with 'allowance' (v31).

Comparison to Sola Fide: D&C 1:32 ('he that repents and does the commandments... shall be forgiven') contrasts with Romans 4:5 ('to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Hearken to the voice of the Lord/servants (v1)
2. Fear and tremble (v7)
3. Prepare for that which is to come (v12)
4. Repent (v32)

5. Do the commandments (v32)
6. Search these commandments (v37)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith as the authorized mouthpiece of God
2. Join the 'only true and living church'
3. Reject previous religious traditions as apostate

Ritual Requirements:

1. Participation in the 'everlasting covenant' (implies baptism and later temple ordinances restored by Smith)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 32, it says forgiveness comes to him who 'does the commandments.' How many commandments must you do, and how well must you do them, to be sure you are forgiven?
2. Verse 30 claims this is the 'only true and living church.' How does that make you view the faith of your Christian friends or family members who love Jesus but aren't LDS?
3. Verse 38 says the voice of the servants is the same as the voice of the Lord. How do you handle it when a leader says something that seems to contradict the Bible or previous prophets?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The desire for God to speak clearly. – We all long to hear God. The Good News is that God has spoken definitively, not through a new law, but through His Son. [Hebrews 1:1-2 'God... hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.']
2. God cannot look upon sin with allowance. – This is true and terrifying. It creates a problem we cannot solve by 'doing commandments.' We need a substitute who took that gaze of judgment for us. [2 Corinthians 5:21 'For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin...']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty/Instability [Moderate] – Because the 'voice of the servants' is the same as God's (v38), the believer is subject to the changing policies and doctrines of current leadership. Truth becomes fluid based on the current prophet, creating anxiety about shifting standards.
2. Perfectionism/Legalism [Severe] – The requirement to 'do the commandments' to be forgiven (v32) combined with the statement that God grants 'no allowance' for sin (v31) creates a crushing burden of performance. The believer can never be sure they have done enough to secure forgiveness.
3. Isolation/Elitism [Moderate] – Believing one belongs to the 'only true church' (v30) creates a psychological barrier against all other Christians, leading to spiritual isolation and a burden to convert everyone else to validate one's own standing.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Testimony of the Spirit confirming the words of the modern prophet.

Verification Method: Adherents are told to 'Search these commandments' with the promise that the Spirit bears record they are true (v37-39).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests spirits and prophecies against the objective standard of written Scripture (Acts 17:11, 1 John 4:1). D&C 1 relies on subjective internal confirmation of new revelation that contradicts the biblical canon's sufficiency.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: November 1, 1831.

Authorship: Dictated by Joseph Smith.

Textual Issues: This section was edited before publication in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. Original manuscripts show evolution in the text to clarify priesthood offices and authority structures that developed

between 1831 and 1835.