

SECTION 102

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 102, recorded in 1834 and revised by Joseph Smith, marks a pivotal shift in early Mormonism from a charismatic movement to a structured religious institution. It details the organization of the first 'High Council' in Kirtland, Ohio, a body designed to adjudicate 'important difficulties' and disciplinary cases within the church. The text outlines a specific procedural liturgy: a council of twelve High Priests, presided over by a presidency of three. Unique to this system is the method of casting lots to determine speaking order and the assignment of specific councilors (those drawing even numbers) to represent the interests of the accused, ensuring 'insult and injustice' are prevented. The text asserts that this organizational structure was given 'by revelation' and establishes a hierarchy where the President of the Church holds the ultimate decision-making power, subject to the sanction of the council. Crucially, it provides a mechanism for expanding doctrine: if written scripture is insufficient to resolve a case, the President may inquire of the Lord for new revelation (v. 23). Later verses (30-32), added in 1835, distinguish this standing council from the 'Traveling High Council' (the Twelve Apostles), solidifying the administrative framework of the growing church. For the believer, this text validates the divine authority of church courts and the necessity of priesthood hierarchy in maintaining order.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Jr. (President), Sidney Rigdon (Counselor), Frederick G. Williams (Counselor), Oliver Cowdery (Councilor), Orson Hyde (Clerk/Councilor), Martin Harris (Councilor), Joseph Smith, Sr. (Councilor)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. ECCLESIASTICAL JURISPRUDENCE

Assertion: God requires a structured, hierarchical court system comprised of High Priests to judge the standing of believers.

"The high council was appointed by revelation for the purpose of settling important difficulties... (D&C 102:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical Christianity generally views church discipline (Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Corinthians 5) as a restorative process managed by the local congregation or its elders, intended to bring a sinner to repentance. It rejects the notion of a 'High Council' or a judicial court system that mimics the Sanhedrin or civil law. D&C 102 institutionalizes a legalistic framework where 'High Priests' adjudicate spiritual standing. This creates a mediation layer between the believer and God that Evangelicalism rejects, upholding instead the Priesthood of all Believers where Christ is the only mediator (1 Timothy 2:5).

2. OPEN CANON / CONTINUING REVELATION

Assertion: If existing scripture is insufficient to settle a doctrinal dispute, the President receives new revelation to resolve it.

"In case of difficulty respecting doctrine... if there is not a sufficiency written... the president may inquire and obtain the mind of the Lord by revelation. (D&C 102:23)"

Evangelical Comparison: This is a critical divergence. Evangelicalism holds to the sufficiency of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17), believing the Bible contains all necessary knowledge for salvation and godliness. D&C 102:23 explicitly states that 'written' word may not be sufficient, authorizing the President to generate new binding revelation. This renders the canon open and fluid, making the objective standard of the Bible subject to the subjective experience of the church leader.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the nature of the Church and Priesthood. D&C 102 constructs a 'High Council' of 'High Priests' to judge the saints, effectively rebuilding the veil that Christ tore. In Evangelical theology, Christ is the sole High Priest (Hebrews 4:14), and all believers are priests (1 Peter 2:9). The text's

reliance on a President who can generate new revelation (v. 23) creates a dynamic, open canon that fundamentally contradicts the Evangelical commitment to Sola Scriptura. The focus shifts from the finished work of Christ to the ongoing administration of a theocratic government.

Shared Values:

Desire for order in the church (1 Cor 14:40).; Need for conflict resolution mechanisms.; Concern for justice and preventing false accusation.

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Verse 23 allows the President to receive new revelation if written scripture is insufficient, denying the sufficiency of the Bible.
- 2. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Restricts governance and judgment to a specific class of 'High Priests,' denying the priesthood of all believers.
- 3. [Major] Sola Gratia – Establishes a legalistic system where standing is maintained through judicial review rather than grace.

Semantic Warnings:

<p>"High Priest"</p> <p>In Text: An office in the Melchizedek Priesthood held by specific men in the church hierarchy.</p> <p>Evangelical: In the OT, the Levitical leader; in the NT, exclusively Jesus Christ (Hebrews), with no continuation of the office.</p> <p>Example: <i>D&C 102:1 appoints 'twelve high priests' to judge; Hebrews 7:23-24 says there were many priests in the OT because of death, but Jesus holds his priesthood permanently.</i></p>
<p>"Council"</p> <p>In Text: A formal court with authority to determine standing and doctrine.</p> <p>Evangelical: Usually refers to advisory bodies or the Sanhedrin (often hostile to Christ); NT church governance is pastoral, not judicial.</p> <p>Example: <i>The 'High Council' in D&C 102 functions like a court of law; biblical elders function as shepherds.</i></p>

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly linked to maintaining good standing within the church structure.

How Attained: Requires submission to Priesthood authority and favorable judgment by church councils.

Basis of Assurance: A 'clean record' before the High Council.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Sola Fide offers assurance through faith in Christ's finished work. D&C 102 implies assurance is contingent on judicial clearance by human high priests.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Organize a High Council of twelve high priests.
- 2. Cast lots to determine speaking order.
- 3. Appoint councilors with even numbers to defend the accused.
- 4. The President must render a decision after hearing evidence.
- 5. Record minutes of the proceedings.

Implicit Obligations:

- 1. Submit to the judgment and authority of the High Council.
- 2. Accept the hierarchy of the Priesthood as the 'law of heaven'.
- 3. Acknowledge the President's power to receive new revelation.

Ritual Requirements:

- 1. Casting of lots (voting/drawing numbers) as a sacred procedural step.

2. Formal prayer to adjourn.

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 23, it says the President can get new revelation if the written word isn't sufficient. How do you determine if a new revelation contradicts the Bible?
2. The text mentions 'High Priests' judging the people. How does this relate to Hebrews 7, which says Jesus is our High Priest forever?
3. I noticed verses 15-17 require someone to speak for the accused to prevent injustice. That's a beautiful concept. Who do you see as your advocate when you stand before God?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Advocate for the Accused – Just as the council appoints a defender for the accused, God has appointed Jesus Christ as our Advocate. We are all 'accused' by the Law, but Christ stands for us. [1 John 2:1 - 'We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.']

Spiritual Weight:

1. Institutional Anxiety [Moderate] – The believer is subject to a complex judicial system where their standing depends on the decision of human leaders. This creates a fear of man and institutional rejection.
2. Epistemological Uncertainty [Severe] – Because the President can receive new revelation that supersedes written text (v. 23), the believer can never be certain that the rules or doctrines won't change tomorrow.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Authoritative Revelation via Hierarchy

Verification Method: Common consent (voting) of the council to sanction the President's decision (v. 19).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of Scripture (Acts 17:11) and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, not the procedural sanctioning of a high priest's decision.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: February 17, 1834 (Original Minutes); 1835 (Verses 30-32 added).

Authorship: Minutes by Oliver Cowdery and Orson Hyde; Revised by Joseph Smith.

Textual Issues: The text explicitly notes that verses 30-32 were added later under Joseph Smith's direction. This indicates the text is a composite document, evolved to fit changing church hierarchy (the addition of the Twelve Apostles).