

SECTION 130

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 130, recorded in 1843, represents a critical juncture in the theological development of Mormonism, moving decisively away from traditional Christian metaphysics toward a materialist theology. In this text, Joseph Smith explicitly rejects the 'sectarian' (traditional Christian) view of God as a spirit dwelling in the heart, asserting instead that the Father and Son possess tangible bodies of flesh and bones. The text introduces a distinct cosmology where angels are identified as former humans, time is relative to planetary residence, and the earth itself is destined to become a celestial 'Urim and Thummim.' Perhaps most significant for daily practice is the articulation of the 'Law of Irrevocable Decree,' which posits that all divine blessings are strictly predicated upon obedience to specific laws, establishing a transactional framework for the relationship between God and humanity. The text also touches on eschatology, the persistence of human intelligence into the resurrection, and includes a specific prophecy regarding the American Civil War.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, God the Father, Jesus Christ (The Son), The Holy Ghost, Angels (identified as humans)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. ANTHROPOMORPHIC GOD (CORPOREALITY)

Assertion: God the Father and Jesus Christ have tangible bodies of flesh and bones; they are not merely spirits.

"The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's; the Son also (D&C 130:22)."

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, God is Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being. He is the Creator, wholly distinct from the created order. D&C 130:22 collapses this distinction, presenting a God who is physically embodied and, by implication of the text's context ('man like ourselves'), is of the same species as humanity. This denies the classical Trinitarian understanding of God's nature and suggests a finite, localized deity rather than an omnipresent Spirit.

2. TRANSACTIONAL BLESSINGS (LAW OF IRREVOCABLE DECREE)

Assertion: All blessings from God are obtained only by obedience to the specific law upon which that blessing is predicated.

"There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven... upon which all blessings are predicated—And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law (D&C 130:20-21)."

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical soteriology posits that while obedience is a fruit of faith, God's blessings—particularly salvation and justification—are gifts of grace, not debts God owes to human performance (Romans 4:4-5). D&C 130:20-21 systematizes a legalistic framework where God is bound by cosmic law to dispense blessings only upon the satisfaction of specific requirements. This shifts the focus from relationship and grace to performance and technical compliance.

3. ETERNAL PROGRESSION OF INTELLIGENCE

Assertion: Knowledge and intelligence gained in this life persist in the resurrection and provide an advantage in the world to come.

"If a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life... he will have so much the advantage in the world to come (D&C 130:19)."

Evangelical Comparison: The Bible speaks of rewards, but emphasizes that in heaven, believers will be like Christ and that earthly wisdom is often foolishness to God (1 Corinthians 1:20). This doctrine suggests that intellectual or 'spiritual' accumulation in mortality creates a permanent stratification or 'advantage' in eternity, fostering a sense of urgency to accumulate knowledge for status rather than rest in Christ's finished work.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 130 represents a total departure from Christian orthodoxy. By asserting God has a body of flesh and bones, it moves Mormonism into henotheism or materialism, denying the essential nature of God as Spirit (John 4:24). Furthermore, the 'Law of Irrevocable Decree' (v20-21) codifies a system of salvation and blessing that is strictly transactional. This is the direct antithesis of the Gospel of Grace, where blessings are bestowed because of Christ's merit, not human compliance with cosmic laws. The text redefines the very nature of reality, God, and salvation.

Shared Values:

Belief in the Second Coming of Christ.; Belief in the resurrection of the dead.; Importance of obedience (though the motivation differs).; Value of family and social relationships.

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Theology Proper (Nature of God) – Asserts God has a physical body of flesh and bones.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide / Sola Gratia – States blessings are predicated on obedience to law, not grace.
3. [Major] Sola Scriptura – Prophet corrects biblical text (John 14) via new revelation.

Semantic Warnings:

"God/Father"

In Text: A specific, exalted man with a body of flesh and bones who lives on a planet/globe.

Evangelical: The Infinite, Uncreated Spirit, invisible and omnipresent (1 Timothy 1:17).

Example: When a Mormon reads 'The Father,' they visualize a physical man; an Evangelical visualizes the invisible Spirit.

"Angels"

In Text: Resurrected or disembodied humans who belong to this earth.

Evangelical: A distinct order of created spiritual beings, not humans (Hebrews 1:14).

Example: In D&C 130, angels are our 'kin'; in the Bible, they are a separate species of servant.

"Blessing"

In Text: A result earned by triggering a specific law through obedience.

Evangelical: Unmerited favor bestowed by God's grace.

Example: In D&C 130, you 'obtain' a blessing by paying the price of obedience.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined as entering the celestial kingdom (v11), receiving a 'white stone' (new name), and enjoying eternal sociality with glory.

How Attained: Through obedience to laws (v21) and gaining intelligence/knowledge (v19).

Basis of Assurance: Confidence is based on one's own diligence and obedience to law.

Comparison to Sola Fide: D&C 130:21 ('when we obtain any blessing... it is by obedience') is incompatible with Romans 3:28 ('justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Obey specific laws to obtain specific blessings (v21).
2. Reject the notion that God dwells in the heart (v3).

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accumulate 'intelligence' and knowledge to secure an advantage in the next life.
2. Seek the 'new name' and 'key words' (implied reference to Temple ordinances in v11).
3. Accept Joseph Smith's prophetic authority over biblical interpretation.

Ritual Requirements:

1. Temple ordinances (implied by 'new name' and 'key word' in v11).

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. D&C 130:22 says the Father has a body of flesh and bones. How do you reconcile that with Jesus saying 'God is Spirit' in John 4:24?
2. If every blessing is predicated on obedience to a law (v21), how does that fit with the Bible's teaching that salvation is a gift of God, not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9)?
3. Verse 19 says we get an 'advantage' in the world to come based on our intelligence here. Does that create anxiety about needing to learn enough before you die?
4. When you pray, do you visualize a man with flesh and bones, or an omnipresent Spirit?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. Eternal Sociality – The human longing for connection and relationships is valid. The Gospel promises we will be with the Lord and the 'cloud of witnesses,' but the focus is on the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, not just perpetuating earthly social structures. [1 Thessalonians 4:17 (We will be with the Lord forever); Revelation 19:7-9 (Marriage Supper of the Lamb).]
2. The White Stone / New Name – This borrows from Revelation 2:17. It speaks to the desire for intimacy and a unique identity with God. In Christ, we are given a new identity as 'children of God' without needing secret keywords. [Revelation 2:17; 1 John 3:1.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance/Legalism [Severe] – The 'Law of Irrevocable Decree' creates a crushing burden where every unanswered prayer or missing blessing is interpreted as a personal failure to obey a specific law. It removes the comfort of God's sovereign grace.
2. Cosmic Limitation [Moderate] – Worshipping a God who is a 'man like us' with a body limits the believer's view of God's power and presence. God is not everywhere; He is on a planet. This can lead to a sense of isolation.
3. Intellectual Anxiety [Moderate] – The teaching that intelligence gained now creates an eternal 'advantage' drives a frantic need for acquisition of knowledge/status, fearing one will be permanently 'behind' in eternity.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Direct revelation to the prophet; personal diligence/obedience.

Verification Method: Adherents verify truth by the 'blessings' received through obedience to law (pragmatic verification).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective standard of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, not on new prophetic voices that contradict written Scripture or on the accumulation of hidden 'keys' and 'intelligence.'

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Instructions given April 2, 1843. Canonized in 1876.

Authorship: Joseph Smith (recorded by scribes, likely William Clayton or Willard Richards).

Textual Issues: The text is a composite of items of instruction. The delay between the recording (1843) and canonization (1876) allows for potential redaction, particularly regarding the Civil War prophecy.