

SECTION 18

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

OVERVIEW

Given in June 1829 to Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer, Doctrine and Covenants Section 18 serves as a foundational administrative and theological text for the nascent Church of Christ (later LDS). It formally commissions Cowdery and Whitmer to search out and identify the original Quorum of the Twelve Apostles for the latter days. The text famously articulates the 'worth of souls' doctrine (verses 10-16), using the high value of humanity to motivate intense missionary labor. However, it simultaneously establishes a rigorous soteriology where salvation is contingent upon baptism, enduring to the end, and strict obedience to commandments. It asserts that the voice of God is heard through the reading of these specific revelations by the Spirit, establishing a closed epistemological loop where the text validates itself through the reader's spiritual experience.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, The Twelve Apostles (Prophetic designation), Paul the Apostle

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL SALVATION VIA OBEDIENCE

Assertion: Salvation in the Kingdom of the Father is contingent upon keeping the commandments after receiving the gospel.

"And after that you have received this, if you keep not my commandments you cannot be saved in the kingdom of my Father. (D&C 18:46)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelical Christianity teaches that justification is a one-time forensic declaration by God based on the finished work of Christ received by faith (Romans 3:28, Ephesians 2:8-9), D&C 18:46 explicitly ties final salvation to ongoing obedience. The text asserts that even after receiving the gospel, failure to keep commandments results in a forfeiture of salvation. This aligns with the Mormon concept of 'Enduring to the End' as a requirement for exaltation, rather than the Evangelical view of works as the fruit—not the root—of salvation.

2. PNEUMATIC TEXTUAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Assertion: Reading the words of the revelation by the power of the Spirit is equivalent to hearing God's voice.

"For it is my voice which speaketh them unto you... Wherefore, you can testify that you have heard my voice, and know my words. (D&C 18:35-36)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, the Bible is the objective standard of truth (Sola Scriptura), and the Holy Spirit illuminates the believer's mind to understand it. D&C 18:35-36 creates a circular epistemology where the text claims that the spiritual sensation felt while reading it constitutes 'hearing [Christ's] voice.' This effectively places the subjective experience of the reader on par with direct revelation, insulating the text from external objective criticism.

3. RESTORATION OF APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

Assertion: A new Quorum of Twelve Apostles must be called, holding the same authority as the biblical Paul.

"I speak unto you, even as unto Paul mine apostle, for you are called even with that same calling with which he was called. (D&C 18:9)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelicals generally hold that the office of Apostle (capital 'A') was unique to the eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ and the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20), with the canon of Scripture replacing their living authority. D&C 18 asserts that the office is perpetual or restored, and that Cowdery and Whitmer possess the specific authority of Paul, implying that the biblical church structure was lost and required restoration.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While D&C 18 uses familiar Christian terminology (repentance, baptism, salvation), the definitions differ radically. In this text, the Atonement (v11-12) provides the *opportunity* for man to save himself through obedience and ordinances, rather than effecting a completed salvation received by faith. The text explicitly states that failure to keep commandments results in non-salvation (v46), re-erecting the veil of the law that Christ tore down. Furthermore, the authority structure is centered on a restored hierarchy rather than the universal priesthood of believers.

Shared Values:

The immense worth of the human soul; The necessity of repentance; Jesus Christ as the only name for salvation; The call to evangelism/missionary work

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Explicitly states salvation is forfeited if commandments are not kept (v46).
2. [Critical] Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone) – Claims new revelation is the voice of God and necessary for the foundation of the church.
3. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Restricts authority to a specific hierarchy (The Twelve, Joseph Smith) rather than the body of believers.

Semantic Warnings:

"Salvation"

In Text: Exaltation or entrance into the Kingdom of the Father, contingent on baptism and perfect obedience (v46).

Evangelical: Deliverance from the penalty of sin and reconciliation with God, granted freely by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8).

Example: In D&C 18:46, 'cannot be saved' implies losing one's place in heaven due to disobedience; in Romans 8:1, 'no condemnation' assures the believer of security despite imperfections.

"Church"

In Text: The specific institutional organization established by Joseph Smith (v5).

Evangelical: The universal body of all true believers in Christ across all denominations (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

Example: Building up 'my church' in D&C 18 refers to the LDS institution; in Matthew 16:18, it refers to the assembly of the faithful.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Entrance into the 'kingdom of my Father' (v44, 46).

How Attained: By repenting, being baptized, taking Christ's name, and keeping commandments (v22, 46).

Basis of Assurance: There is no assurance of salvation in the present tense; it is contingent on future performance ('if you keep not...').

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly opposes Sola Fide. D&C 18:22 requires one to 'endure to the end' to be saved, whereas John 5:24 states the believer 'has' (present tense) eternal life.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Rely upon the things which are written (Book of Mormon/Revelations)
2. Repent and be baptized
3. Keep the commandments
4. Search out the Twelve Apostles (directed to Cowdery and Whitmer)
5. Declare the gospel
6. Take upon oneself the name of Christ

7. Walk uprightly and sin not

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith as the revealer of God's voice
2. Validate the truth of the text through subjective spiritual feelings
3. Submit to the hierarchy of the Twelve once established

Ritual Requirements:

1. Baptism by immersion (implied by context of 'written' things)
2. Ordination of priests and teachers

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 46, it says if you don't keep the commandments you cannot be saved. How do you define 'keeping the commandments'-is it perfection, or is there a certain percentage required?
2. Verse 10 says the worth of souls is great. Do you believe God values you because of your missionary success (v15), or because of what Jesus did for you?
3. When verse 36 says you 'hear his voice' by reading these words, does that mean your feelings determine truth, or does the text stand true regardless of how we feel?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Worth of Souls – This is a powerful bridge. We agree souls are valuable. But *why*? In Mormonism, it's often potential for godhood. In the Gospel, it's because we are image-bearers for whom Christ died while we were yet sinners. [Romans 5:8, 1 Peter 1:18-19]
2. Suffering the pain of all men – Acknowledges the scope of the Atonement. We can pivot from 'pain' to 'penalty'. He didn't just feel our pain; He paid our debt. [Isaiah 53:5, 2 Corinthians 5:21]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety / Legalism [Severe] – The explicit threat in verse 46 ('if you keep not my commandments you cannot be saved') places the entire weight of eternity on the believer's ability to maintain obedience. This creates a treadmill of works where one can never be sure they have done 'enough'.
2. Epistemological Circularity [Moderate] – By defining the 'voice of God' as the reader's reaction to the text (v35-36), the believer is trapped. If they don't feel the Spirit, the fault is internal (lack of faith), not textual. This prevents objective testing of truth.
3. Pressure to Evangelize [Moderate] – Verses 15-16 link 'great joy' specifically to the number of souls brought. This can commodify relationships, viewing people as 'potential converts' rather than neighbors, and links the believer's eternal reward to their recruitment success.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Subjective spiritual experience interpreted as the 'voice of God' while reading the text.

Verification Method: Adherents are told that if they read by the power of the Spirit, they are literally hearing Christ's voice (v35-36).

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the objective, historical deposit of faith in Scripture (Jude 3, 2 Timothy 3:16). D&C 18 relies on internal affective confirmation ('burning in the bosom' concept implied) to validate the text's divine origin.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: June 1829

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: This revelation was originally published in the Book of Commandments (1833). Significant edits were made for the 1835 D&C edition to reflect evolving hierarchy (e.g., adding details about the Twelve).