

SECTION 22

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

OVERVIEW

Given on April 16, 1830, shortly after the official organization of the Church of Christ (later The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), this revelation addresses a specific ecclesiastical crisis. Several individuals who had previously been baptized in other Christian denominations (likely Baptist or Restorationist groups) desired to join Smith's movement without undergoing a new baptism. In this text, Joseph Smith speaks in the voice of God to declare that 'all old covenants' are done away. The text asserts that regardless of a believer's sincerity or previous faith, any baptism performed outside of Joseph Smith's restored authority is equivalent to 'dead works' and the 'law of Moses.' It establishes a hard boundary of exclusivity: entrance into the 'strait gate' is impossible without the specific priesthood authority claimed by Smith. This section serves as the foundational text for the LDS practice of requiring re-baptism for all converts, regardless of their prior Christian standing.

KEY FIGURES

God (The Speaker), Joseph Smith (The Revelator), Prospective Converts (The Audience seeking exemption from re-baptism)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. INVALIDITY OF NON-LDS BAPTISM

Assertion: Baptisms performed by other Christian denominations are void and hold no spiritual value.

"although a man should be baptized an hundred times it availeth him nothing (D&C 22:2)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical Christianity, the validity of baptism is rooted in the believer's faith and the command of Christ (Matthew 28:19), typically recognizing the ordinance across denominational lines if performed in the name of the Trinity. D&C 22 radically departs from this by rooting validity entirely in the specific priesthood authority held by Joseph Smith. It categorizes all other Christian baptisms—regardless of the believer's sincerity or faith in Jesus—as 'dead works' that 'avail nothing.' This creates a closed system where salvation (entering the gate) is institutionally exclusive to the LDS Church.

2. THE NEW AND EVERLASTING COVENANT

Assertion: The restoration of the gospel through Joseph Smith constitutes a new covenant that supersedes previous religious commitments.

"all old covenants have I caused to be done away in this thing; and this is a new and an everlasting covenant (D&C 22:1)"

Evangelical Comparison: Biblically, the 'New Covenant' is ratified by the death of Christ (Luke 22:20, Hebrews 9:15) and is accessible to all who believe. D&C 22 redefines the 'New and Everlasting Covenant' not merely as the work of Christ, but as the specific ecclesiastical and ritual administration restored through Joseph Smith. By stating 'all old covenants have I caused to be done away,' the text suggests that the covenantal access to God available to Christians prior to 1830 has been revoked or superseded by Smith's organization.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental theological gap lies in the locus of authority and the definition of the Church. For Evangelicals, the Church is the universal body of believers, and authority comes from God's Word and the Holy Spirit, making baptism a testimony of faith valid anywhere. D&C 22 asserts that the Church is a specific institution with exclusive priesthood keys. It creates a gap where a sincere believer in Jesus Christ is considered to be outside the 'strait gate' and operating in 'dead works' simply because they lack connection to Joseph Smith's hierarchy. This replaces Sola Fide (faith alone) with a requirement for specific ecclesiastical authorization.

Shared Values:

Necessity of Baptism (generally); Concept of a 'Strait Gate'; Rejection of 'Dead Works' (though defined differently)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Universal Priesthood – Denies that believers have standing before God to baptize or be baptized outside of Smith's hierarchy.
2. [Critical] Sola Fide – Implies that faith in Christ is insufficient for salvation without the specific ritual of LDS baptism.
3. [Major] Ecclesiology (Nature of the Church) – Rejects the invisible, universal church in favor of a single, institutional organization.

Semantic Warnings:

"Dead Works"

In Text: Religious ordinances (like baptism) performed by Christians without LDS priesthood authority.

Evangelical: Actions performed to earn salvation or rituals devoid of faith (Hebrews 6:1, 9:14).

Example: *In D&C 22, a sincere Baptist baptism is a 'dead work.' In the Bible, a Pharisee keeping the Sabbath without love is a 'dead work.'*

"New and Everlasting Covenant"

In Text: The fullness of the gospel ordinances restored via Joseph Smith.

Evangelical: The covenant of grace established by Jesus's blood (Hebrews 13:20).

Example: *D&C 22 claims the 'new' covenant requires re-baptism into the LDS church.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Entering the 'strait gate' through authorized baptism into the LDS Church.

How Attained: By obedience to the command to be re-baptized by proper authority.

Basis of Assurance: Confidence is placed in the validity of the Priesthood authority rather than the finished work of Christ alone.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Directly contradicts Sola Fide by stating that previous faith-based baptisms 'avail nothing.' It adds a ritual condition (authorized baptism) as an absolute necessity for entering the gate.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Enter ye in at the gate (get baptized into the LDS Church)
2. Seek not to counsel your God

Implicit Obligations:

1. Renounce previous Christian baptism as invalid
2. Accept Joseph Smith's authority as the only valid channel for ordinances

Ritual Requirements:

1. Re-baptism by proper LDS authority

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. When D&C 22 says a baptism performed a hundred times 'avails nothing,' does that mean my faith in Jesus at my baptism meant nothing to God?
2. How do you define 'dead works'? Does it mean trying to earn heaven, or does it mean worshipping without a specific priesthood holder present?

3. If Jesus is the 'strait gate' (John 10:9), why does this section imply the gate is a ritual performed by a specific church?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Strait Gate – The text correctly identifies that there is a narrow way to life. The bridge is identifying that Gate as the Person of Christ, not a denomination. [John 10:9 ('I am the door'), Matthew 7:13-14]
2. Desire for True Covenant – The human heart longs for a covenant that cannot be broken. The Gospel offers this through the unchangeable priesthood of Jesus, not human leaders. [Hebrews 7:24-25]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Invalidation of Experience [Severe] – The believer is told that their previous encounters with God, answers to prayer, and public confession of faith (baptism) were 'dead' and worthless. This creates doubt about their ability to know God apart from the institution.
2. Institutional Dependency [Moderate] – Salvation is tethered to the church organization. If the believer loses trust in the leaders, they theoretically lose their connection to the 'strait gate.'
3. Exclusivity/Isolation [Moderate] – Creates a psychological barrier between the convert and their Christian family/friends, who are now viewed as operating under 'dead works.'

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation (The voice of God mediated through Smith).

Verification Method: Obedience to the command is the primary verification; the text discourages questioning ('seek not to counsel your God').

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelical epistemology tests prophecy against Scripture (1 Thessalonians 5:21, Acts 17:11). D&C 22 demands submission to the new revelation over and against previous scriptural understanding or tradition.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: April 16, 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The text was given in response to a specific question from new converts. It solidifies the 'Restoration' as a replacement of Christianity, not a reformation.