

SECTION 29

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

OVERVIEW

Given in September 1830 through Joseph Smith, Doctrine and Covenants Section 29 serves as a foundational eschatological and cosmological text for early Mormonism. Speaking in the first person as Jesus Christ, the text commands the 'gathering' of the elect to a specific physical location to prepare for imminent tribulation. It outlines a timeline involving signs of the times, the Second Coming, a millennial reign, and a final judgment where the Twelve Apostles (from the New Testament) will judge Israel. Theologically, it introduces distinctively Mormon concepts: the pre-mortal existence where Satan rebelled to usurp God's honor, the idea that the Fall of Adam was a necessary event to establish human agency ('bitter' required to know 'sweet'), and the assertion that all commandments and creations are 'spiritual' rather than temporal. It concludes by affirming the innocence of children, stating they cannot sin until the age of accountability, explicitly rejecting the traditional doctrine of Original Sin.

KEY FIGURES

Jesus Christ (The Speaker), Joseph Smith (The Revelator), The Twelve Apostles (Biblical), Michael (The Archangel/Adam), Satan (The Adversary), Adam (The First Man)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. THE NECESSITY OF THE FALL (FELIX CULPA)

Assertion: Adam's transgression was necessary for humanity to possess agency and knowledge; without the 'bitter,' man could not know the 'sweet.'

"And it must needs be that the devil should tempt the children of men, or they could not be agents unto themselves... (D&C 29:39)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, Adam possessed perfect agency and communion with God prior to the Fall; sin was a catastrophic abuse of that agency, not a necessary step for spiritual development. D&C 29:39-40 reframes the Fall as a functional necessity, suggesting that moral agency requires the active presence of evil and that Adam's sin was essential for human progression. This leads to the LDS view of the Fall as a 'fall forward,' whereas Evangelicals view it as a spiritual death requiring total regeneration (Ephesians 2:1-5).

2. PRE-MORTAL EXISTENCE AND WAR IN HEAVEN

Assertion: Satan and one-third of the hosts of heaven rebelled against God before the creation of the earth because Satan sought God's power/honor.

"the devil was before Adam, for he rebelled against me... and also a third part of the hosts of heaven turned he away from me (D&C 29:36)"

Evangelical Comparison: While the Bible speaks of Satan's fall (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, Luke 10:18), it does not teach that human beings pre-existed as spirits who participated in this conflict. D&C 29 establishes the 'War in Heaven' as the backstory for human anthropology, implying that humans are the same species of being as angels and God, merely at a different stage of development. Evangelicalism maintains a strict Creator-creature distinction (Colossians 1:16).

3. INNOCENCE OF CHILDREN (REJECTION OF ORIGINAL SIN)

Assertion: Little children are redeemed from the foundation of the world and cannot sin until they reach the age of accountability.

"they cannot sin, for power is not given unto Satan to tempt little children, until they begin to become accountable before me (D&C 29:47)"

Evangelical Comparison: Evangelical theology teaches that all humans inherit a sinful nature from Adam (Psalm 51:5, Romans 5:12-19). D&C 29 explicitly rejects this, stating that children are born innocent and Satan is

powerless to tempt them. This shifts the need for a Savior from 'rescue from a nature of wrath' (Ephesians 2:3) to 'rescue from individual acts of sin committed after accountability.'

4. MONISTIC CREATION (ALL THINGS SPIRITUAL)

Assertion: God created all things spiritually; there is no true distinction between temporal and spiritual commandments or matter.

"all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law which was temporal (D&C 29:34)"

Evangelical Comparison: Biblical theology distinguishes between the Creator (Spirit) and the creation (matter), though God redeems matter. D&C 29:34 asserts a fundamental monism where 'all things are spiritual.' In later LDS theology (D&C 131), this evolves into the claim that 'spirit is matter, but more fine or pure,' rejecting the classical Christian definition of God as immaterial Spirit (John 4:24).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: While the eschatological framework shares surface-level similarities with premillennialism, the underlying anthropology is radically different. By claiming the Fall was necessary for humans to become 'agents unto themselves' (v39), the text makes God the architect of sin's entry into the world as a pedagogical tool. Furthermore, the denial of Original Sin (v46-47) removes the biblical necessity for the imputation of Christ's righteousness, replacing it with a system where men are punished only for their own sins after a certain age. This fundamentally alters the doctrine of salvation from rescue from spiritual death (nature) to rescue from bad behavior (acts).

Shared Values:

Belief in the Second Coming of Christ; Belief in a final judgment; Resurrection of the dead; Condemnation of wickedness; Christ as Advocate with the Father

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – Adds new revelation that modifies biblical teaching on the Fall and Satan.
2. [Critical] Hamartiology (Doctrine of Sin) – Teaches the Fall was necessary and beneficial for agency.
3. [Major] Theology Proper / Anthropology – Implies pre-mortal existence of humans and blurs Creator/creature distinction ('all things are spiritual').
4. [Major] Original Sin – Explicitly denies that children are born with a sin nature.

Semantic Warnings:

"Spiritual"

In Text: A state of existence that encompasses all creation; even 'temporal' laws are spiritual to God (v34).

Evangelical: Pertaining to the Spirit or non-material reality, often contrasted with 'flesh' or 'worldliness' (1 Corinthians 2:13-15).

Example: In D&C 29, a command to move to Missouri is 'spiritual.' In the Bible, spiritual usually refers to the state of the heart or the Holy Spirit's work.

"Agency"

In Text: The capacity to act, which was only made possible by the Fall and the existence of temptation (v39).

Evangelical: The will of man, which was free before the Fall but became enslaved to sin after the Fall (Romans 6:17-20).

Example: D&C 29 claims Adam needed to sin to have agency. The Bible implies Adam used his agency to sin.

"Elect"

In Text: Those who hear the voice of the Lord (via Joseph Smith) and physically gather.

Evangelical: Those chosen by God for salvation before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).

Example: In D&C 29, being 'elect' is contingent on the action of gathering.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Resurrection (immortality) for all; Eternal Life (exaltation) for those who gather, repent, and keep commandments.

How Attained: Through the Atonement of Christ, conditional upon hearkening to His voice, gathering, and keeping commandments.

Basis of Assurance: Conditional assurance based on obedience: 'sin no more, lest perils shall come upon you' (v3).

Comparison to Sola Fide: The text explicitly links cleansing to obedience: 'my blood shall not cleanse them if they hear me not' (v17). This introduces a conditional element to the efficacy of the Atonement based on human response, contrasting with the Evangelical view of the Atonement's sufficiency applied by faith alone.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Listen to the voice of Jesus Christ (v1)
2. Humble themselves and call upon God in mighty prayer (v2)
3. Sin no more (v3)
4. Declare the gospel with the sound of rejoicing (v4)
5. Gather the elect into one place (v7-8)
6. Prepare hearts against the day of tribulation (v8)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Accept Joseph Smith's revelations as the direct voice of Christ
2. Prepare physically and spiritually for an imminent apocalypse
3. Believe in the pre-mortal narrative of the War in Heaven

Ritual Requirements:

1. Gathering (physically moving to the designated location)
2. Prayer (united and mighty)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 39, it says the devil ~~had~~ to tempt Adam so he could be an agent. Does this mean God needed Satan's help to complete His plan for humanity?
2. Verse 3 says 'sin no more.' How do you interpret that command in your daily life? Do you feel you are living up to it?
3. If little children cannot sin (v47), why does the Bible say in Psalm 51:5 that we are 'conceived in sin'?
4. Verse 17 says Christ's blood won't cleanse those who don't hear Him. How does that make you feel about your own security if you have a bad day or struggle to 'hear' perfectly?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Hen and Chicks – This image (also in Matt 23:37) shows Christ's desperate, tender longing to protect His people from judgment. It bridges to the Gospel by showing that the shelter is Christ Himself, not our own works or gathering. [Matthew 23:37, Psalm 91:4]
2. The Advocate – We need an advocate because we are guilty. This points to 1 John 2:1, where Jesus pleads His propitiation for our sins, not our own merits. [1 John 2:1-2]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty / Fear [Severe] – The text links the efficacy of Christ's blood to the believer's ability to 'hear' and obey (v17). This creates a fear that if one is not perfectly attuned or obedient, the Atonement is nullified for them.

2. Perfectionism [Moderate] – The command 'sin no more' (v3) combined with the threat of 'perils' creates a high-pressure environment where spiritual safety is contingent on behavioral perfection rather than grace.

PISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation

Verification Method: Internal testimony and obedience to the prophet's voice as the voice of God.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals test all claims against the closed canon of Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text demands acceptance based on the authority of the speaker (Joseph Smith speaking as Christ) rather than consistency with previous biblical revelation regarding the nature of sin and the Fall.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: September 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The text reflects the early 'gathering' phase of Mormonism. The concept of 'Michael' being Adam (v26) is an early development of Smith's identification of biblical figures with historical/angelic roles.