

SECTION 30

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

OVERVIEW

Doctrine and Covenants Section 30, given in September 1830, represents a pivotal moment in the early organization of the Latter-day Saint movement. Originally three separate revelations combined in the 1835 edition, the text addresses three of the 'Eight Witnesses' to the Book of Mormon: David, Peter Jr., and John Whitmer. The text functions primarily as a corrective and administrative document. David Whitmer is severely chastised for fearing man more than God, focusing on worldly things, and heeding unauthorized sources (historically understood as the rival revelations of Hiram Page). He is demoted, in a sense, to laboring at his father's house. Conversely, Peter Whitmer Jr. is commanded to accompany Oliver Cowdery on a significant mission to the 'Lamanites' (Native Americans), establishing a precedent for the church's focus on indigenous peoples as a covenant remnant. John Whitmer is called to local proclamation. Theologically, the text reinforces Joseph Smith's central authority by rebuking those who listen to other voices and establishes a soteriology where eternal life is contingent upon diligence and obedience to commandments.

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith (The Voice of the Revelation), David Whitmer, Peter Whitmer Jr., Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, Philip Burroughs

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL ETERNAL LIFE

Assertion: Eternal life is a reward granted based on the adherent's diligence in keeping commandments and heeding authority.

"Wherefore, give heed unto these things and be diligent in keeping my commandments, and you shall be blessed unto eternal life. (D&C 30:8)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, eternal life is the present possession of the believer upon the moment of justification by faith (John 5:24, Romans 6:23). It is a gift of God's grace, not a result of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). D&C 30:8, however, frames eternal life as a future conditional state ('you shall be') contingent upon human performance ('be diligent in keeping my commandments'). This shifts the basis of salvation from the finished work of Christ to the ongoing fidelity of the believer, reintroducing a merit-based system similar to the Galatian heresy Paul refuted.

2. LAMANITE IDENTITY

Assertion: Native Americans are identified as 'Lamanites,' a remnant of the House of Israel to whom the gospel must be restored.

"I have given unto him power to build up my church among the Lamanites (D&C 30:6)"

Evangelical Comparison: The text commands a mission to the 'Lamanites,' referring to Native Americans on the western frontier. This presupposes the historical accuracy of the Book of Mormon, which claims Native Americans are descendants of Israelites (Lehi). Evangelical Christianity holds no such anthropological dogma, viewing Native Americans as distinct peoples created in God's image but without the specific covenant lineage claimed by Mormon scripture. This doctrine is foundational to Mormon missiology but has no biblical parallel.

3. HIERARCHICAL MEDIATION

Assertion: Spiritual safety and standing require submission to specific appointed leaders (Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery).

"give heed unto the words and advice of your brother... And none have I appointed to be his counselor over him... except it is his brother, Joseph Smith, Jun. (D&C 30:5, 7)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicals respect church leadership (Hebrews 13:17), they reject the notion that one's spiritual standing is mediated by obedience to a specific hierarchy or that a single prophet holds the 'keys' to the church. D&C 30 emphasizes strict subordination: Peter must heed Oliver, and Oliver must heed

Joseph. David is chastised for listening to those 'not commanded' (rival claimants to revelation). This establishes a structure where truth is determined by office rather than scripture.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the mechanism of salvation and authority. D&C 30:8 explicitly links eternal life to the diligence of the believer in keeping commandments. This is a 'covenant of works' paradigm. Evangelicalism operates on a 'covenant of grace' paradigm where diligence is the **fruit** of salvation, not the **root** or condition of it. Furthermore, the text assumes Joseph Smith has the authority to issue binding commandments from God that supersede or add to the Bible, creating a rival authority structure to Sola Scriptura.

Shared Values:

The danger of fearing man more than God; The call to evangelism/missionary work; The need to prioritize spiritual things over worldly things

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Eternal life is promised as a result of diligence in commandment keeping (v8).
2. [Major] Sola Gratia – Grace is not mentioned; the focus is entirely on the adherent's labor and obedience.
3. [Critical] Sola Scriptura – New revelation is given through Joseph Smith that binds the conscience of believers.
4. [Major] Universal Priesthood – Access to God's will is restricted; members must heed those 'set over' them (v2, v5).

Semantic Warnings:

"Eternal Life"

In Text: Exaltation/Godhood, achieved through diligence and ordinances (D&C 30:8).

Evangelical: Life with God, a gift received by faith in Christ (Romans 6:23).

Example: When D&C 30:8 says 'blessed unto eternal life,' it implies earning a specific high status in the afterlife, whereas Romans 6:23 describes it as a free gift.

"Lamanites"

In Text: Native Americans, viewed as descendants of Israelites.

Evangelical: N/A (Term does not exist in the Bible).

Example: The text sends missionaries to 'Lamanites' (v6), a group the Bible does not identify.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Eternal life (v8), framed as a future reward.

How Attained: Through diligence in keeping commandments and heeding the prophet/leaders.

Basis of Assurance: Performance and obedience to the hierarchy.

Comparison to Sola Fide: D&C 30:8 ('be diligent... and you shall be blessed unto eternal life') stands in direct contrast to Titus 3:5 ('Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us').

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. David: Return to father's house
2. David: Attend to ministry in the church and surrounding regions
3. Peter: Journey with Oliver Cowdery to the Lamanites
4. Peter: Give heed to Oliver's words and advice
5. John: Proclaim the gospel at Philip Burroughs' house

6. John: Labor in Zion with all his soul

Implicit Obligations:

1. Reject rival claims to revelation (implied by rebuke of David)
2. Accept Joseph Smith's supreme authority over the church
3. Prioritize ministry over 'things of the earth'

Ritual Requirements:

1. Missionary service (preaching/proclaiming)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 8, the Lord tells Peter Whitmer that if he is diligent, he will be blessed unto eternal life. How do you define 'diligent enough' to know you have secured that blessing?
2. David Whitmer was chastised for fearing man more than God. How does the assurance of salvation by grace (Ephesians 2:8) help a Christian overcome the fear of man?
3. The text mentions a mission to the Lamanites. How do you view the relationship between Native American ancestry and the Book of Mormon today?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Fear of Man – We all struggle with seeking human approval. The Gospel frees us because we are already fully approved by God through Christ's righteousness. [Proverbs 29:25, Galatians 1:10]
2. The Desire for Deliverance – The text speaks of deliverance from affliction. Jesus offers ultimate deliverance not just from temporal trouble, but from the power of sin and death. [Colossians 1:13]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Performance Anxiety [Severe] – The command to 'be diligent... unto eternal life' places the infinite weight of one's eternal destiny on their finite ability to perform and obey. This creates a cycle of anxiety, as one can never be sure they have been 'diligent' enough.
2. Dependency on Hierarchy [Moderate] – The rebuke of David for not heeding those 'set over' him creates a spiritual environment where questioning leadership is equated with spiritual failure. This removes the safety of the Berean principle (checking leaders against scripture) and enforces compliance.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation. Knowledge is received through the designated mouthpiece (Joseph Smith).

Verification Method: Obedience and experience. David is told to 'ponder' but ultimately must submit to the hierarchy to correct his course.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology tests all prophecy against Scripture (Acts 17:11, 1 John 4:1). Here, the validity of the message is self-authenticated by the Prophet's claim to speak for God, and the recipient is chastised for listening to outside voices.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: September 1830

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: Originally three separate revelations. Combined into one section in the 1835 edition of the D&C. This redaction obscures the fact that they were individual addresses.