

SECTION 58

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

OVERVIEW

Given on August 1, 1831, in Jackson County, Missouri, Doctrine and Covenants Section 58 is a foundational text for the Latter-day Saint concept of Zion. Joseph Smith declares this specific geographic location to be the gathering place for the Saints, instructing them to purchase land and establish a physical city. The text outlines the administrative structure of this new society, specifically elevating the office of Bishop (Edward Partridge) to the status of a 'judge in Israel' who divides inheritances. Theologically, the section is significant for its definitions of agency and repentance. It introduces the concept that believers possess inherent power to do good and must be 'anxiously engaged' in good causes without waiting for specific commands. Furthermore, it establishes a rigorous standard for forgiveness, asserting that true repentance is verified only when a sinner confesses and permanently forsakes the sin. The text blends practical instructions regarding land acquisition and civil obedience with eschatological promises of the 'marriage of the Lamb.'

KEY FIGURES

Joseph Smith, Edward Partridge, Sidney Rigdon, Martin Harris, William W. Phelps, Ziba Peterson

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. CONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS VIA ABANDONMENT OF SIN

Assertion: Forgiveness is contingent upon the sinner successfully confessing and permanently forsaking the sin.

"By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them. (D&C 58:43)"

Evangelical Comparison: In Evangelical theology, repentance is a change of mind (metanoia) and heart that leads to behavioral change, but the forgiveness itself is grounded in the finished work of Christ (1 John 1:9). D&C 58:42-43 shifts the locus of verification from faith to performance. By stating that one knows a man repents *only* if he forsakes the sin, it implies that if a sin is repeated, repentance never truly occurred, and thus forgiveness was never granted or is revoked. This creates a 'probationary' view of forgiveness distinct from the 'justification' found in Romans 5:1.

2. INHERENT HUMAN AGENCY AND MERIT

Assertion: Humans have the inherent power to do good and generate righteousness independent of specific divine command.

"For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward. (D&C 58:28)"

Evangelical Comparison: D&C 58:27-28 argues that men should be 'anxiously engaged' in good causes because 'the power is in them.' This suggests a Pelagian or semi-Pelagian anthropology where the human will retains the capacity to generate righteousness that merits reward. In contrast, Evangelical theology asserts that 'it is God who works in you to will and to act' (Philippians 2:13) and that apart from Christ, humans can do nothing of spiritual value (John 15:5).

3. GEOGRAPHIC ZION

Assertion: Zion is a literal city to be built in Independence, Missouri.

"And also that you might be honored in laying the foundation, and in bearing record of the land upon which the Zion of God shall stand... (D&C 58:7)"

Evangelical Comparison: While the Old Testament focuses on Jerusalem, the New Testament universalizes the concept of Zion to the church and the heavenly city (Hebrews 12:22). D&C 58 re-territorializes the concept, commanding the purchase of specific real estate in Missouri to build a physical utopia. This moves the focus from the spiritual kingdom of God to a geo-political project.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: D&C 58 illustrates the fundamental shift in Mormonism from a theology of grace to a theology of geography and merit. While Evangelicals view the 'City of God' as a spiritual reality accessible to all believers through the Spirit, this text restricts it to a specific American location requiring financial purchase. More critically, the soteriology in verses 42-43 undermines the assurance of salvation. By defining repentance as the successful cessation of sin, it leaves the believer in a state of perpetual insecurity—never knowing if they have 'forsaken' a sin enough to be truly forgiven. This contradicts the Evangelical understanding of Sola Fide, where the believer's standing is secured by Christ's righteousness, not their own consistency.

Shared Values:

Care for the poor (v8); Obedience to civil law (v21); Importance of evangelism (v64); Reality of the Second Coming (v65)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Sola Fide – Forgiveness is conditioned on the believer's ability to 'forsake' sin, making justification dependent on works/sanctification.
2. [Major] Sola Gratia – The text claims the 'power is in them' to do good, denying the total depravity of man and the necessity of preventient grace.
3. [Major] Theology Proper (Kingdom of God) – Localizes the Kingdom to a specific American geography rather than the universal spiritual reign of Christ.
4. [Moderate] Universal Priesthood – Establishes a hierarchical judge (Bishop) to control heritage and inheritance, mediating the believer's standing in the community.

Semantic Warnings:

"Zion"

In Text: A literal city to be built in Independence, Missouri.

Evangelical: The dwelling place of God; historically Jerusalem, prophetically the New Jerusalem or the Church (Hebrews 12:22).

Example: *In D&C 58, you 'purchase' Zion with money. In the Bible, you come to Zion through faith in Christ.*

"Repentance"

In Text: A process verified by the complete cessation of the sin ('forsake them').

Evangelical: A change of mind and heart toward God (Metanoia) that results in fruit, but is not invalidated by future struggles (Romans 7).

Example: *In D&C 58, if you repeat a sin, you haven't repented. In the Bible, a righteous man falls seven times and rises again (Proverbs 24:16).*

"Bishop"

In Text: A judge who manages temporal assets and land inheritance.

Evangelical: An overseer/pastor charged with spiritual care and teaching (1 Timothy 3).

Example: *Edward Partridge is commanded to divide land; Biblical bishops are commanded to teach sound doctrine.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Implicitly defined here as entering Zion, receiving an inheritance, and being crowned with glory after tribulation (v4).

How Attained: Through obedience, enduring tribulation, purchasing land, and successfully forsaking sin.

Basis of Assurance: Personal performance: 'By this ye may know... he will confess and forsake.'

Comparison to Sola Fide: D&C 58:43 stands in direct contrast to Romans 4:5 ('to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly'). The text requires the 'work' of forsaking sin as the proof of pardon.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Purchase lands in Independence, Missouri (v37, 52)
2. Preach the gospel to every creature (v64)
3. Keep the laws of the land (v21)
4. Edward Partridge to divide inheritances (v17)
5. Martin Harris to give his money to the Bishop (v35)
6. Sidney Rigdon to write a description of Zion (v50)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Be self-motivated in religious activity ('anxiously engaged') without waiting for orders
2. Achieve perfection in abandoning sin to ensure forgiveness
3. Submit financial resources to ecclesiastical leaders

Ritual Requirements:

1. Consecration of land and temple spot (v57)
2. Gathering to Missouri (v56)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. In verse 43, it says we know a man has repented if he 'forsakes' his sin. If I struggle with the same sin again next week, does that mean I never truly repented the first time?
2. Verse 28 says 'the power is in them' to do good. How does that fit with Jesus saying 'apart from me you can do nothing' (John 15:5)?
3. The text focuses heavily on purchasing land in Missouri for Zion. How do you view the New Testament teaching that we are looking for a city 'whose builder and maker is God' (Hebrews 11:10) rather than one bought with money?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Longing for Zion – This reflects the universal human longing for a restored world and communion with God. [Revelation 21:1-4 fulfills this longing not with a city we build in Missouri, but with the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, where God dwells with man by grace.]
2. The Desire to be 'Anxiously Engaged' – Christians are called to be 'zealous for good works' (Titus 2:14), not to earn salvation, but as a response to it. [Ephesians 2:10 - We are created in Christ Jesus *for* good works, which God prepared beforehand.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Uncertainty of Forgiveness [Severe] – The requirement to 'forsake' sin to validate repentance creates a crushing burden. A believer can never be sure they are forgiven until they are certain they will never commit that sin again—a certainty impossible for fallen humans.
2. Performance Pressure [Moderate] – The command to be 'anxiously engaged' because the 'power is in you' places the weight of sanctification on the believer's willpower rather than on the Holy Spirit's fruit.
3. Financial/Geographic Obligation [Moderate] – The command to purchase land and gather creates a financial and physical burden to relocate and contribute to a specific earthly project to secure one's inheritance.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Prophetic Revelation.

Verification Method: Obedience to the prophet's voice and observing the fulfillment of the gathering.

Evangelical Contrast: Evangelicals test truth by Scripture (Acts 17:11). This text demands adherence to Joseph Smith's dictates as the voice of God, placing the prophet's word on par with or above biblical authority.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: August 1, 1831

Authorship: Joseph Smith (dictated)

Textual Issues: The revelation was edited for the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants. Original manuscripts show minor variations common to the compilation process.